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## The Greater Struggle Necessary

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THE TIMES seem to call not for glibness but for reflection. So instead of a snappy slogan for the 1955 NCTE convention, we had a theme in the form of a full statement, taken, in the centennial year of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, from Walt Whitman: "*Now understand me well—it is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary.*"

No situation, it seems to me, could demonstrate the essential truth of Whitman's quotation better than the situation in American education today. Out of the many fruitions of success in our tremendous experiment in mass education have come only further and harder struggles. Today we seem to be beset by nothing but hardships and criticism. We face inadequate physical conditions, spiraling enrollments, and an increasing shortage of teachers; we must contend with those who would censor our books and force us to teach their special doctrines; and we must defend ourselves from all manner of attack on our curricula and our methods. These, however, are not problems peculiar to English teachers, for they are shared by all who work in the field of education. And since they have been discussed countless times in print and in conventions, they hardly need further elaboration here.

Therefore, I should like to direct your attention to three unfortunate tendencies within our own profession that threaten our effectiveness just at a time when our responsibilities are increasing.

Before discussing them I should prob-

ably tell you what I mean by an unfortunate tendency within the profession. I consider any tendency unfortunate which lures us away from our main task, which in my opinion is to develop in our students the highest possible degree of curiosity about, respect for, and competence in language and literature. Implied in this definition are the following: that our main concern is with matters of the mind, that as English teachers we have a clear-cut and exciting body of content in language and literature, and that our task includes the development of skill, the imparting of information, the encouragement of intellectual independence, and the creation of a sense of moral responsibility for what one writes and says. If you think this places me among the educational troglodytes, so be it. And now for the tendencies themselves.

The first of the three that I consider unfortunate is our current tendency to justify our work almost wholly on the basis of its practicality. I should like to submit that if this tendency persists our position as a profession will be greatly weakened.

Possibly the development of such a tendency was inevitable. Practicality is a value deeply rooted in our American tradition. It was necessitated by the hardships of opening up a new world; it has paid off handsomely in materialistic comforts beyond the dreams of the pharaohs; in its better senses it has been given respectability as a rule of life by everyone from Benjamin Franklin to John Dewey. In the minds of many, the highest accolade we

can bestow on an American is that he is practical and down to earth.

In education this penchant for practicality has evidenced itself in the desire to make training as specific as possible in meeting the demands of everyday life. This in turn has led to the proliferation of vocational courses and programs for every conceivable practical purpose from baby care to embalming. More slowly and more subtly it has given new utilitarian twists to the old humanistic studies, witness the increasingly popular conception of English as a service program.

Those who consider English as only a service program see us as the grease-monkeys of the academic world. We are tolerated in order to check the student's punctuation points, reduce his reading time, and delicately adjust his mixture of air and gas so that he can speak both informatively and persuasively. It would not be at all amiss, presumably, if we came to work in white coveralls with lettering on the back spelling out "Language Arts and Oil Company." Administrative officers are willing to tolerate required English so that students can learn to communicate with modest success in other departments and courses where, we must believe, the real springs of learning are. Business and professional men want their applicants to have had English so that they can write one-page memos, spell *received*, and not confuse *respectively* with *respectfully*. In short, almost everyone reads the Philadelphia *Bulletin* and agrees that English of a practical sort is good.

We agree too. We've done just about everything we can to make our courses practical. We teach students to do all sorts of practical things: make a grocery list, answer the telephone, read cartoon strips, make signs for pep rallies, and write explanations on how to park a car or build a rabbit hutch. We develop special practical brands of English: Engineering English, Business English, Agricultural English, English for vocational students, English for pharmacy students, English

for students going to college, English for Education majors, Legal English, and English for graduate students writing theses and dissertations. And we want the students to know how practical we are. We get out seductive brochures in which we quote "hard, practical, dollar and cents" businessmen and industrialists on how executive posts and consequently wealth await the English major.

Not only this but we want these businessmen and industrialists to tell us how we can make our courses even more practical. To this end we have been holding conferences with them and asking them how we can best serve their future employees. I attended one of these conferences. We were advised to cut out Chaucer and Shakespeare and "all those fellows who wrote in Old English about problems we don't have any more" and to concentrate on grammar so that our students will know how to write good business letters. This comment may not be representative, however, for I am told at some of these meetings the businessmen, showing better sense than many of the professors in their audience, play down the immediate practicality of English. This is only simple honesty on their part since they well know that most personnel managers are *not* scouring the country for English majors and that some of their corporation brochures warn prospective employees against the very kind of intellectual curiosity that any English teacher worth his salt tries his best to foster. A personnel pamphlet put out by one large New York corporation and distributed among college students puts it bluntly: "Personal views can cause a lot of trouble." There is truly something to keep in mind the next time you try to make your program more practical!

For English teachers, it seems to me, this emphasis on the purely practical can be only the road to intellectual and professional ruin. To be sure, we hope that our courses will be helpful in a practical sense, that the students because of them will do better in their other courses and

subsequently be more successful in their trades, businesses, and professions. But if we aim only at what is immediately and demonstrably useful, we cannot help neglecting those profounder aspects of language and literature that can really stir the mind and quicken the imagination. What is more, we shan't teach even the practical aspects of our field well since they will not be placed in a context which gives them any meaning other than a narrowly materialistic one. Emerson spoke of this when he compared true prudence with what he called "spurious prudence." "The spurious prudence, making the senses final, is the god of sots and cowards, and is the subject of all comedy. . . . The true prudence limits this sensualism by admitting the knowledge of an internal and real world."

The unvarnished truth is that if we accept the notion that as English teachers we belong to nothing but a service department, we stand to lose almost all of our course content. In some schools this has already happened; the social sciences have taken over the study of language, speech has taken over rhetoric, journalism has taken over the study of the mass media, required literature has been dropped, and the English teacher is left with his rules for the comma and his exercises on *who* and *whom*. This is a sorry end for a once proud profession!

Our second unfortunate tendency, in my opinion, is our tendency to be indiscriminating in our use of scientific terminology and techniques. If this tendency persists, I submit, we shall end up distorting the basic nature of our discipline.

Sound scientific methodology is, of course, as essential in our research as it is in research anywhere. By using it we have improved our teaching, our tests, and our curricula. For example, carefully controlled experiments have shown us that reading can ordinarily best be taught by a combination of sight and sound methods, and not just by sight alone or by Flesch's phonics. Likewise, controlled experiments

have demonstrated that improvement in writing is best achieved by disciplined practice in writing and not by memorizing rules of grammar or by filling out workbooks. In addition to making it possible for us to improve our teaching methods, scientific research has added to our knowledge of our own field—witness the tremendous discoveries in the field of linguistics once scientific methodology was employed. We in English have been far too slow in employing appropriate scientific techniques in studying our problems, and so I am glad to report that the Council is taking steps to encourage more research of a high order.

But the appropriate use of scientific methodology is one thing, and the indiscriminate and ostentatious use of scientific terms and procedures is quite another. The latter began in the study and teaching of literature over a hundred years ago. Under the influence of German scholarship we began classifying literary works into genres, sub-genres, and sub-sub-genres, and developing standards and requirements for each. As a consequence we still cannot decide whether *Moby-Dick* is a really good book since it does not fit into any of our sharp little categories. At the same time, we began teaching literature as though it were nothing but historical fact. Facts were what we wanted, and facts were what we ladled out to the student. This tendency still persists, with the result that though many of our students never learn to read a poem they can report with touching confidence that the *Lyrical Ballads* first appeared in 1798, that Shakespeare wrote tragedies, comedies, histories and tragi-comedies, and that Poe had a low tolerance for alcohol.

More recently our eagerness to appear scientific, especially in teaching the verbal skills, has become almost pathological. We have opened Reading Clinics, Writing Laboratories, and Speech Clinics. When we get into these antiseptic areas we call ourselves *clinicians*, and the students become *cases*. We keep fever charts of their

attempts with the comma, and plot their reading rate improvement on graph paper. (In all this we are happily encouraged by our boards and administrators who seem always to be able to find a sock full of money for tape recorders, reading accelerators, and other such scientific gadgets but who are veritable Mother Hubbards when the question of hiring an additional teacher is raised.)

We delight in formulas of all kinds. By averaging sentence lengths, discovering the number of syllables per one hundred words, and calculating the per cent of personal words, we can determine the readability of any piece of prose, and prove to even the most dubious student that *The Waste Land* is at least as easy to read as *Steve Canyon*.

We have learned that subjectivity is a bad word, and we cultivate its scientific opposite, objectivity. In reading themes our ideal becomes the electronic calculator: coolly and dispassionately we click off the number of comma splices, dangling modifiers, and misspelled words, add them up, rumble for a moment or two, and come out with a grade. Even this dispassionate process is not completely satisfying, however, for we are coming to believe that *nothing* a student has written can be considered reliable evidence of his ability to write. So we are now fast coming to the point where we determine a student's writing ability by having him take a multiple-choice test over something he has read.

In this indiscriminate use of the terminology and techniques of science we can destroy ourselves professionally. For if we come to believe that charts and graphs and coefficients are all that are necessary for the teaching of English we give evidence of the most abysmal ignorance of what human expression is and what its potentialities are. What is more, we deny the essential integrity of the student, who is ever and always a person and never a statistic, an abstraction, a hypothetical average, or a case study. We shall never be able to teach anyone to communicate effec-

tively or to share with us the experiences of literature if we treat him like something that came out of the wrong end of an IBM machine.

The third unfortunate tendency I should like to mention is our tendency to become sentimental in our attempts to adjust training and materials to the needs of the individual student. If this tendency persists, I submit, our standards will collapse and we shall lose all semblance of intellectual respectability.

It has been greatly to the credit of modern education that it has become knowing enough and flexible enough to take differences of individual growth into account—and to do this in years when enrollments have been doubling and trebling. The possibilities of individualized training have not been fully exploited and are not likely to be fully exploited so long as enrollments increase and textbooks and other materials remain as uniform as they are today. But progress has been substantial, and for this progress English teachers and the National Council can claim modest credit. We believe that training should be adjusted insofar as possible to the needs and potentialities of the individual student. We have affirmed this many times, and never more forcefully than in our current curriculum series.

Unfortunately, the principle of individualized training is a sword that can cut two ways: applied by wise and tough-minded educators it can result in a program that encourages if not forces every student to perform to the maximum of his ability; in the hands of sentimentalists the application of this principle can result simply in pampering and the ultimate collapse of academic standards.

Now, despite our quixotic efforts to be practical and to seem scientific, we English teachers as a group are not noted for our tough-mindedness. At least the most common caricatures of English teachers would not allow us to believe so. Consider, for example, the picture of the typical high school English teacher who does *so* hope



her students will learn what a non-restrictive clause is, who lyricizes about the "the treeness of the tree," and who gets herself entangled in all of her students' emotional problems and in none of their intellectual ones. You will recall the English teacher in the Mr. Peepers TV program of last year: lovable, bumbling Mrs. Gurney who didn't have a solid thought in her head. Consider, too, the picture of the college English teacher who affects tweeds and a pipe and who ruminates vaguely about the beauties of the "Ode to Autumn," and who can always be jollied into a good grade when one knows the right techniques.

We must hope that these caricatures are vastly over-drawn, for sentimentalism is a luxury we cannot afford. Infatuation with scientific processes causes us to make abstractions out of our students; sentimentalism causes us to baby them. In neither case do they get taught. Possibly the greatest problem we face in the days ahead is to learn how to individualize our training without lowering our standards—or better yet, to learn how to use individualized training for the purpose of *raising* our standards.

So far, the signs are not encouraging. Many attempts to individualize training in elementary and secondary schools have resulted only in babying, in instruction consciously or unconsciously designed for the most retarded, and in an shocking toleration of intellectual indolence. In college, attempts to individualize training have had similar results, for they almost always boil down to special care for the mentally lame, halt, and blind. If there are reading clinics and writing laboratories for the *best* students in our colleges I have not heard of them.

This sentimental tailoring of training to students needs begins in the individual classroom. Noting that several students in one of our classes are intellectually three or four years behind the class average, we cast about for especially easy assignments that they can handle. But

differentiated materials are hard to find and harder to develop; so shortly we solve the problem of our retarded pupils by making things easier for everybody. We make the exercises simpler, the subjects for themes more childish, and literary analysis never harder than finding the moral in "A Psalm of Life." It is not long before our standards have dropped out of sight, and our classroom has become little more than an over-sized play-pen.

Standards plummet, too, when in order to take account of individual growth we become preoccupied with problems of adjustment. Here again the almost irresistible temptation is to concentrate on the so-called problem children and to develop interest activities designed to get them working with the group. In the meantime, the initiative, imagination, and intellectual curiosity of the better students are allowed slowly to drain away. I know of one school, for example, where *The Tale of Two Cities* is employed not as a piece of literature but as a source of jolly projects that the students can do together. During the time that the book is scheduled for reading, the girls are taught how to knit and the boys how to construct guillotines.

I shan't go into the crimes perpetrated under the slogan, "We teach the child, not the subject," for that has already been done in many recent publications. I can't forbear pointing out the syntactical inadequacy of the statement, however, which seems to me to be highly suggestive of the intellectual emptiness of some of the programs built upon it. *Teach*, I take it, in this context is a transitive verb and *child* is the indirect object. Where is the direct object? *What* is taught to the child? Whatever others may do, I pray that you and I keep our eyes on our direct object: we teach the child *English*.

But even those of us who feel we have a clear-cut and respectable subject to teach succumb—and at all levels—far too frequently to that most insidious of all academic heresies perpetrated in the name of adjustment: namely, that a student learns

a lot more from his extra-curricular activities than he does from his studies. It would be interesting to know how many times in the past month each of us has tolerated hurried work or no work at all because a student convinced us—or we convinced ourselves—that a football game, a dance, a class play, or some other great socializing event was really more important to him than our assignments.

Student adjustment is certainly a desirable goal of education. It can be achieved in a number of ways. In English classes, though, it seems to me that it is least likely to be achieved when the teacher makes a fetish of it at the expense of intellectual discipline. In the long run, the English instructor can best aid his students to become adjusted by insisting upon a rigorous study of language and literature. What can possibly have higher potential for adjustment than growing competence in communication and a growing understanding of life as seen through the powerful binoculars of prose and poetry? These can bring adjustment through wisdom instead of through resignation; they can bring a sense of security through confidence in oneself and not through surrender to substitute mothers.

Let me emphasize that we must try, despite increasing enrollments and heavier teaching loads, to take account of differences in individual growth. But we must remain tough-minded enough to do this without lowering our academic standards.

Earlier I suggested that the three tendencies that I have been discussing are especially unfortunate because they are threatening our effectiveness just at a time when our responsibilities are increasing. Let me develop this point briefly and then I am done.

As I have said, it seems to me that our immediate task is to develop in our students at every level the highest possible degree of curiosity about, respect for, and competence in language and literature. In carrying out this immediate task, we have the more general obligation of helping

students develop intellectual independence and moral responsibility. This general obligation is one that we have always shared with teachers in other fields. But unless I am badly mistaken, it is a burden that will increasingly have to be shouldered by us—if it is to be shouldered at all.

The tendency in most other fields now is to minimize or even eliminate the type of assignment that encourages independent thought and requires the weighing of one's words for accuracy and honesty. It has been estimated that at the college level fewer than a half of the instructors in departments other than English are demanding disciplined recitations, term papers, or essay examinations. And the number is steadily dwindling. In the secondary schools it is doubtful that even a half are assigning papers and essay examinations that are read with more than a modicum of attention to precision in thought and idea.

I do not believe that I am exaggerating when I say it is only in English classes that most students have regular opportunities to reflect upon themselves and their world and to give expression to those reflections in words that are their own and for which they bear the responsibility. It is only in English classes where most students are regularly called to account for faulty generalization, for disorderly thinking, for irresponsibility in attitude and statement. It is only in English classes where most students are regularly encouraged to read widely, to express personal interpretations, and to develop individual standards of judgment.

Indeed English may well, in the face of increasing standardization and mechanization in other disciplines, represent the one last and best hope of American education for the encouragement of independence in thought and judgment. Even if there is only an iota of truth in this generalization, our responsibility is staggering. Certainly it is a responsibility that we shall not be able to shoulder success-

fully until we first put down those tendencies within us that threaten our position as a profession, the basic nature of our discipline, and our very intellectual respectability.

Our profession has been a large one, an influential one, and a respectable one. To use Whitman's phrase, its members have enjoyed countless "fruits of success," many known to all of us, many more known only to a single teacher and a single

student. Now out of this past replete with successes has come forth in the essence of things that which makes a greater struggle necessary. Let us accept this challenge with equanimity, and conduct ourselves as individuals, as a Council, and as a profession, with dignity and intelligence. And may we all in this company find the will to bring yet this greater struggle to the fruition of success.

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## Values and Goals in Communication

A Statement by the President of NCTE

The years just ahead offer a significant opportunity to members of the NCTE. Never did the problems of communication loom so large as they do in the world today. Never was the need for understanding the role of language in human affairs more acute. As life grows more complex that role becomes increasingly more crucial. There is no other field of learning which ours does not touch. There is no subject in the curriculum which ours does not permeate.

We are fast becoming aware of the challenge of our subject and are shifting our concentrated attention—for the moment—to the processes of communication itself. During the past few decades we have been probing deeply into the needs of our pupils—how they can be appealed to, how their interests can be won and sustained and turned to worthwhile ends. We have made remarkable strides in our study of the learner himself and the learning process. All this is as it should be.

But to fulfill our obligation to the child, to the youth, to the young adult in our charge, we must pay attention not only to what he is, but to what he will become. We need to understand not only the needs of the child but the needs of the adult, latent within him. If *Experience* was the watchword of the past few decades, perhaps *Values* is the watchword of today. (Toward what goals of understanding should experiences with language lead?)

As we enter a new year I should like to invite the teachers of language arts all over America to a renewed interest in the rich field in which we teach. The pupils before us deserve our enthusiastic interest in our subject. Indeed, they will catch their own enthusiasm for language learning largely from us, and it is precisely because our subject is so important to survival in the troubled world of today that we need also to understand children, so that we may communicate with them and help them to learn the subtle arts of communication.

LUELLA B. COOK

# Faulkner's *Old Man* in the Classroom

RICHARD J. STONESIFER

ILSE DUSOIR LIND'S "The Teachable *Faulkner*" (*College English*, Feb. 1955) concerns an important problem—the choice of a work by the Nobel prize-winner that will not set the average undergraduate reeling with incomprehension. Certainly she is right in saying that his acknowledged masterpiece, *The Sound and the Fury*, is too complex; Campbell and Foster have put that nicely when they note that it "presents peculiarities of style and meaning which make it practically meaningless unless read with the aid of insights proffered by the Freudian theory of dream-work." But just as certainly she is wrong when she brackets *Old Man* with *The Unvanquished* and *Intruder in the Dust* and remarks that "they lack either the poetic density or the exalted intention which raises Faulkner's greatest achievements to the status of masterworks. . . ."

*Old Man* has been persistently misunderstood and underrated, and it is the present writer's opinion, based on experience, that it is an excellent book for the introduction of undergraduates to the titan from Mississippi. It is also a central Faulkner work and a considerable one. Faulkner himself has implied as much,<sup>1</sup> and no less a critic than Malcolm Cowley has declared (in the *Portable*) that "it isn't as good as *Huckleberry Finn*, by a long distance; but it is the only other story of the Mississippi that can be set beside *Huckleberry Finn* without shriveling

under the comparison; it is the only other story in American literature that gives the same impression of the power and legendary sweep of the River." It is the clearest and simplest of his more difficult novels and an excellent example of his often-overlooked talent as a story-teller. However, as any reader knows, the important thing in Faulkner is never the story itself but meanings drawn from the interweaving of plot and style. *Old Man* has not usually been so studied but instead dismissed as a fabulous tale concerning an "engaging moron" (Clifton Fadiman) or a "highly charged political allegory" (John Chamberlain) or studied in relation to *The Wild Palms*, with which is originally appeared, the chapters of the two novels sandwiched together for some obscure Faulkner purpose.

Now, thanks to the New American Library's paperback edition (Signet 1148), the two novels appear in the same volume but printed separately, so that this tiresome and unrewarding puzzle-game can stop. And applying the same analytic study to it that is usually accorded Faulkner novels reveals that it is an excellent choice for the college classroom for two reasons: it fully illustrates one of the three chief Faulkner themes and the other two tangentially; it affords the teacher the opportunity of pointing out with relatively simple material Faulkner's use of patterning, myth, and symbol.

The three chief Faulkner themes, as Cowley has outlined them for us, are the depiction of Southern tradition, cosmic pessimism ("ultimate cosmic reality, which, dramatically at least, seems in his work to be considered essentially chaotic," according to Campbell and Foster), and concern with man's future. The second of these is central to *Old Man* and can be

<sup>1</sup> Faulkner gave it a prominent place on his map of Yoknapatawpha County for the *Viking Portable*, though he erred in his legend ("Here was born the convict and grew a man and sinned and was transported for the rest of his life to pay for it"); in the story the convict receives an initial sentence of fifteen years, to which ten are added for his "attempted" escape. Or is this an error? Perhaps the end of the convict's life is a part of a yet-unwritten Faulkner story.



illustrated by it completely and intelligibly to undergraduates; the first and third are by no means so fully indicated, but a study of *Old Man* will serve the student as an excellent introduction to these themes as he will find them if he chooses in an examination of the works more directly part of the Yoknapatawpha saga, for as Cowley puts it, this story is "the connection between Yoknapatawpha County and the rest of the South: our horizons widen as the convict floats down the river."

The convict himself is not only an integral part of Faulkner's Southern picture, one of the rednecks (not a Negro, as Miner contends), born in the pine hills southeast of Frenchman's Bend where the effort of existence itself is terrible so that, as Coughlan says, "there is a slow deliberation in the way these people walk and speak, as if they were pushing through an invisible but enveloping and heavy fluid." He is also one of Faulkner's most engaging heroes, a man of awesome integrity, a presentation of the embodiment of the old Southern traditions—steadfastness, gallantry, courage—but twisted ironically to mirror Faulkner's horror at what has happened to those traditions. If Colonel Sartoris is Faulkner's picture of one kind of Southern cavalier, the convict is a picture of what happens to a moral creature in the contemporary world.

No one seems to have noticed that Faulkner may intend his convict to be a Don Quixote reversed, a cruelly ironic modern counterpart of the idealistic knight<sup>2</sup>—the convict enters the prison be-

cause he has been driven to attempt a hopeless train robbery by too much reading of pulp romances; he goes through the mounting terrors of his expedition on the flooded Mississippi, attempting but succeeding in what seem to be foolish and hopeless assaults against the forces arrayed against him; and, at the novel's end, in what must be the most cynical ending in modern literature, he is sentenced to ten additional years in the Parchman prison farm as a reward for his heroic endeavor, a final Faulkner comment on what the Snopeses in triumph have done to the South. (The God-like physician on the steamboat that picks up the convict, his woman-companion, and her baby, determines to put them ashore with the words: "Yes, I think I shall let your native State lick its own vomit.") And the reversal of Don Quixote's desire to set the world right is evident in the convict's frenzied desire to escape the world for the security of the prison farm where no moral choices are necessary.

If Faulkner's third theme, man's future, usually implies that man's hope lies in the reversion to a simpler life with the emphasis on stoicism, simplicity, and decency, *Old Man* represents Faulkner at the nadir of his despair, and in his tall convict he has created an eloquent symbol of the rejection of our world, a symbol heavy with Freudian overtones and frightening in its implications. The additional punishment imposed on the convict and his delight in the security that this represents are meaningful commentaries both on what Faulkner thinks of as our shelving of decency, honor, and morality and on the hopelessness of trying to live in a world that has rejected these values. The book, published in 1939, thus serves as an illuminating reading experience for the student anxious to trace the development of Faulkner's philosophic basis from the earlier writings with their nega-

<sup>2</sup>In *The Wild Palms* Charlotte Rittenmeyer molds a "Don Quixote with a gaunt mad dreamy uncoordinated face," certainly a good description of the convict himself, though it would be foolish to try to show this as a connection between the stories. But it offers evidence of Faulkner's knowledge of *Don Quixote*. Clifton Fadiman (*Party of One*, p. 119) has recently remarked of *Old Man* that "you are never sure whether the mood is supposed to be one of grim hilarity or grim horror." The same might be said of many parts of *Don Quixote*, and may be part of Faulkner's intention. And certainly Faulkner's knowledge of Joyce and of the other users of myth in

modern literature makes this parallel at least tenable.

tivism to his *A Fable* and the celebrated Nobel Prize acceptance speech.

Nor is the novel to be pushed aside as an ambitious literary attempt that somehow fails. The symbol of the flooding river—"as much a created symbol of violence as Addie Bundren's vision of 'blood boiling through the land,'" in O'Connor's words—enables Faulkner brilliantly to use his rhetorical fullness for descriptive purposes, to utilize his impressionistic language in creating feelings of horror at the trials and of exaltation at the triumphs of the convict, and to make use of his distinctive patterning technique.

A close examination of Chapters I and II, for example, will reveal the latter. Skilfully, Faulkner turns us from order to chaos. The story opens by telling us that the times are out of joint—it is April and May but the rains are November-like. The convicts, called out of the prison farm to help during the flood of 1927 when for six weeks twenty thousand square miles of Mississippi were under water, are loaded into a truck and described in terms that describe an explosive before the fuse is lighted: "Inside the high, stall-like topless body the convicts stood, packed like matches in an upright box or like the pencil-shaped ranks of cordite in a shell, shackled by the ankles to a single chain which wove among the motionless feet." The landscape is described in geometrical terms—"ordered and pageant-like," the furrows of the fields "gleaming faintly in the gray light like the bars of a prone and enormous grating" and providing a foreshadowing of the even more terrible confinement that the convict moves into when he is freed from the prison farm. In the distance a woman screams on a housetop, "ceasing at last, whether because of distance or because she had stopped screaming those in the truck did not know," this counterpointed in the next paragraph when a convict afraid of drowning shackled in the truck screams ("But for all the answer he

got the men within radius of his voice might have been dead"). The figures move about the frightening landscape in combinations that Faulkner manipulates: threes, then ones, then the paired convicts "twinning by their clanking and clashing umbilicals," the last word here throwing us ahead to the anti-women, anti-life emphasis of the central and last parts of the novel.<sup>3</sup>

For it is this denial of life, this cosmic pessimism, this passion for womb-like security that is central to the novel. Faulkner less than halfway through the book foreshadows the ending, thus removing any of our suspense and allowing us to concentrate on his grim, thematic symphony.

Don Quixote, we remember, is paired with Sancho Panza and Huck Finn with Nigger Jim, both of these primary characters learning much from their adventure-sharers and these secondary characters assuming positions of equal importance in the respective books' total meanings. The pregnant hill woman in *Old Man* is similarly used by Faulkner, but he provides an ironic twisting: the woman does nothing in the book; she is merely "one single inert monstrous sentient womb," an "inert and inescapable mass of female meat" crouched in the boat in the birth or intercourse position—a constant reminder to the convict that she and he are both victims of biology, giving birth finally on a snake-infested Indian burial mound that provides a symbolic connection with the past but is too a reminder that birth is death-connected and that it is this which places man

<sup>3</sup> In later chapters the reader should note carefully the counterpointing that Faulkner achieves by the use of the swimming deer, of the dead chickens, and of the three snakes that lay "motionless and parallel as underscoring." Or the "entire towns, stores, residences, parks and farmyards which leaped and played about him like fish." The animals, birds, fish and reptiles are the man's equals. Students may be interested in reading Steinbeck's *Flight* to see the use of a comparable symbolic device.

in his "absolutely gratuitous predicament." The unborn child becomes "that thing in your lap" and when the snakes crawl from the boat the convict cries out to the woman: "Shut up! Hush! I wish I was a snake so I could get out too!"

Faulkner by the pattern that he creates underlies the anti-woman, anti-life motif. The woman's bulging belly, which the convict finally has "to make no effort even not to see" because it is the symbol of his unwanted connection with the world, can be contrasted with his own "flat-stomached" condition and with the convict to whom he is shackled by the "clashing umbilical"—short and plump, hairless, doing woman's work on the prison farm, in jail for 199 years because of a woman but given the choice of a lesser sentence had he chosen to face the woman he had wronged. The swollen belly it is that, in one of the central passages of the novel, the convict tells us has "severed me violently from all I ever knew and did not wish to leave and cast me upon a medium I was born to fear, to fetch up at last in a place I never saw before and where I do not even know where I am," a passage that Faulkner italicizes because of its two-leveled significance.

But the convict, like all men, is aware of the necessity of trying to impose order on disorder, of triumphing personally for a moment over inevitable, savage chaos. His dignity as a man demands it, and he senses that the prison guards know of his integrity ("the ones who sent him out with the skiff knew that he never would actually give up"). But he knows that a man's triumph in producing order from the natural chaos is a momentary illusion. In the novel's second chapter the convict sees "two delicate and paradoxical iron railings" of a bridge jutting out of the flood, and they have "an outrageous quality almost significant yet apparently

meaningless like something in a dream not quite nightmare." Looking at the flooded river, the convict says that

its present condition was no phenomenon of a decade, but that the intervening years during which it consented to bear upon its placid and sleepy bosom the frail mechanicals of man's clumsy contriving was the phenomenon and this the norm and the river was now doing what it liked to do, had waited patiently the ten years in order to do, as a mule will work for you for ten years for the privilege of kicking you once.

The Cosmic Intelligence Faulkner calls "eager gleeful vicious incorrigible wilfulness"; the convict is a prisoner "toyed with by a current of water going nowhere, beneath a day which would wane toward no evening"; he waits for "what next could be invented for them to bear"; he knows that he is ultimately a strengthless victim caught in "the furious embrace of flowing mare earth and stallion sun." And with this phrase, redolent of the sexual, Faulkner connects the hill woman's swollen abdomen and his larger philosophical meaning. The convict returns to the prison farm at the novel's end a happy man, for here no efforts will be necessary, no meanings need be sought. Here is womb-like security in a world of inevitable pain and defeat.

*Old Man* is not a pleasant book and, indeed, may be too strong in its implications for others than the liberal and tough-minded. But if we are to deal with Faulkner in the classroom, squeamishness and philosophical timidity can have no part in our thinking, and *Old Man* provides an interesting beginning in the process of teaching our students to understand the significance of Faulkner in our literature. That its cosmic pessimism is no longer his philosophical basis is a sign of his growth and increasing stature as an artist and as a man.

# Hawthorne and Faulkner

RANDALL STEWART

THE SUBJECT of this paper was first broached by George Marion O'Donnell in a pioneering essay, "Faulkner's Mythology" (*Kenyon Review*, Summer 1939), where he dropped the comment that "Mr. Faulkner resembles Nathaniel Hawthorne in a great many ways." The suggestion, merely thrown out by O'Donnell, has since been picked up by Malcolm Cowley, Richard Chase, and others, and has received a rather general endorsement, but without any attempt (so far as I know) to extend the endorsement beyond a sentence or two. The present paper attempts to extend it to a few pages.

The assertion of similarity between two authors apparently so dissimilar was a little surprising to many of us, I imagine, when we first read it back in 1939. The contrasts indeed are flagrant enough when these two writers are juxtaposed: reticence is contrasted with a shocking frankness, obscenity even; readability with abstruseness; normal narrative procedure with complicated time arrangements; authorial omniscience with the stream of consciousness; a style calm and restrained with passionate, dithyrambic utterance. It is hardly worth while to pursue these obvious differences beyond saying that they stem from fairly obvious causes: if Hawthorne had the Puritan coldness, Faulkner belongs to the passionate South; if Hawthorne inherited a neo-classic neatness and objectivity, Faulkner reflects the experimentation and subjectivity of the age of Joyce; if Hawthorne was cabined, cribbed, and confined in Victorian gentleness, Faulkner has enjoyed the new freedom of subject and treatment which was won chiefly by exponents of naturalism (like Dreiser) earlier in the century. Paradoxically, although Faulkner's works could hardly be what they are had they not been preceded by the great works of

Dreiser and the other naturalists, Faulkner, in a deeper sense, represents a break with naturalism and a return to the older tradition of Hawthorne.

The similarities, indeed, are more interesting and significant than the differences, and it will be more rewarding to do our exploring in that direction.

Perhaps I should say that I am not concerned with "influences." I have made no attempt to ascertain whether Faulkner likes Hawthorne, or has read him much, or little, or not at all. It is true that Faulkner's first volume (which consists of quite undistinguished verse) was entitled *The Marble Faun*, but I do not attach much importance to this fact. For the purposes of this paper, the extent of his acquaintance with Hawthorne is of no great consequence, for we are concerned not so much with actual influence as with a common view of the human condition. It cannot be too much insisted upon, I think, that the common view of the human condition held by these two writers is the point to be emphasized most in a comparative study such as I am trying to suggest or adumbrate. And it is particularly noteworthy that Faulkner, in recapturing the older view of Hawthorne, overleaped not only a century, but the whole naturalistic movement which appeared so triumphant at the time when he began to write.

Germane to our subject are the two regions, and the relation of each author to his respective region. The South in the second quarter of the present century (and after) resembled in many ways New England a century earlier. In both cases, a rampant industrialism was transforming the traditional social structure. A marked progressivism was in the air. Making money had become very important. Abbot Lawrence said to Daniel



Webster in 1828, "If we can get this tariff through Congress, we will put the West and the South in debt to New England for a hundred years." It was a true prediction, but by the expiration of that period, a good deal of New England's wealth had moved to the South, and the South was trying to figure out ways by which she might put New England in *her* debt. The whirligig of Time was bringing in his revenges. Descendants of proud old families in the South, as formerly in New England, were caught up in the money craze. It would be interesting to compare Jaffrey Pyncheon and Jason Compson as representatives of the money mania in their respective regions and epochs. Both are rats in a rat-race, and both are treated by their authors about as contemptuously as any characters one is likely to meet with anywhere in fiction.

(Incidentally, it would be interesting to compare also two brilliant, incisive works of social criticism dealing with these progressive eras: one with the advancing South, and the other, a century earlier, with advancing New England. I refer to *Walden* and *I'll Take My Stand*. Thoreau's lament—"Will the division of labor never end?"—is a lament in which the Nashville Agrarians joined heartily.)

If the regions are comparable, the relations of the two authors to their respective regions are comparable, too. Both are loyal sons, inheritors, patriots. Faulkner is the more ardent celebrator. The passage (in *Intruder in the Dust*) about the Southern boy who imagines Gettysburg still unfought is justly famous:

For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and the furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett himself with his long oiled ringlets and his hat in one hand probably and

his sword in the other looking up the hill waiting for Longstreet to give the word and it's all in the balance, it hasn't happened yet....

Justly famous also is the passage (in *The Bear*) which celebrates the Southern seasons and the Southern fertility:

... this land this South for which He [God] had done so much with woods for game and streams for fish and deep rich soil for seed and lush springs to sprout it and long summers to mature it and serene falls to harvest it and short mild winters for men and animals....

Faulkner abounds in passages like these.

Hawthorne is less ardent but none the less doting. In his *Notebooks* he described the New England scenery with loving care. His New Englandism was intensified by his residence abroad. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he declared, "We never were a nation; New England is as large a lump of this earth as my heart can take in."

If Faulkner relived the Civil War, Hawthorne relived the Witch Trials. Both had ancestors who had figured prominently in these momentous events. Both, too, are sensitively aware of the sin and the wrong—the sin of Negro slavery, the crime of Salem in 1692. Each, too (it may be added), had certain important lineal relations, as a writer, to the regional literature which preceded him. If Hawthorne's relation to his New England predecessors (to Cotton Mather, for example) is clearer than Faulkner's relation to his Southern predecessors (to G. W. Harris, for example), it is because the former subject has been a good deal more studied than the latter. The latter subject—a whole new field—has scarcely been studied at all.

Both Hawthorne and Faulkner see the past as inescapable, as one's inevitable inheritance. It was a romantic fallacy to suppose that the past could be brushed aside, a fresh start made, the world's great age begun anew. (It was a curiously

American fallacy to suppose that the New World would produce sinless beings.) The inheritance of the Pyncheons and Maules, the Compsons and Sutpens, is an inexorable thing. In these writers, the past is not dead, it is not even past, it is a continuous living force.

Faulkner's past seems more colorful than Hawthorne's. Life in the house of the seven gables was a drab and mouldy affair. Young Holgrave (a progressive who later turned conservative) was oppressed by the weight of the Puritan centuries: "Shall we never get rid of this Past?" he exclaimed; "It lies upon the Present like a giant's dead body." Faulkner's past emphasizes the heroic, the chivalric, the romantic. Hightower cherished obsessively the vision of "wild bugles and clashing sabres and the dying thunder of hooves."

The New England past, however, was not without its heroisms to Hawthorne, less spectacular though they may have been. If Faulkner's heroic vision drew upon the Civil War, Hawthorne's went back to colonial times, and celebrated heroes like Endicott and the Gray Champion, whose exploits prefigured the great deeds of the American Revolution. "The Gray Champion," said the author, "is the type of New England's hereditary spirit; and his shadowy march on the eve of danger must ever be the pledge that New England's sons will vindicate their ancestry." Endicott was a hero when he tore the Red Cross from New England's banner. Yes, New England had her heroisms, too.

But human experience to these writers is ambiguous; its meaning is double. It is both heroic and unheroic, noble and ignoble, sublime and ridiculous. It was ridiculously ironic that Hightower's grandfather—the hero of the wild bugles, clashing sabres, and dying thunder of hooves—should have been shot and killed while raiding a chicken house. The two narratives which make up *The Bear* reflect this ambiguity: the fine traditional-

ism of the hunting story contrasts sharply with the sordidness revealed by the old ledgers, and both the fine traditionalism and the sordidness are true. Hawthorne has no story with the dual structure of *The Bear* (a structure so admirably designed to show both sides of the picture, both halves of the truth), but he manages nevertheless to achieve a wholeness which does justice to both man's strength and his weakness. Hawthorne, like Faulkner, is very careful to check the debits against the credits. When you think he has given one of his characters a clean bill of health, look again, and you will see the telltale blemish, the sign of imperfection. The foot-travelers to the Celestial City (to take a small illustration from "The Celestial Railroad") would seem to have a better chance than most of escaping denigration, but Hawthorne reminds us that these candidates for sainthood prided themselves on their martyrdom, they liked it when Apollyon squirted the steam in their direction.

Much has been said of the heart-head antithesis in Hawthorne. His villains, like Ethan Brand, stand for the head. It is not, of course, that the author is opposed to the intellect *per se*, or that his fictions are arguments in behalf of that bugaboo of our time, anti-intellectualism. The stories are concerned, rather, with an imbalance between head and heart: Ethan Brand "became a fiend" because "his moral nature had failed to keep the pace of improvement with his intellect." But perhaps a character like Peter Hovenden in "The Artist of the Beautiful" is even more villainous than a great villain like Ethan Brand: he is shrewd, scheming, utterly cold, the foe of all generous acts, the arch-enemy of the beautiful. It is interesting to note that Faulkner's purest villain, Flem Snopes, is a somewhat similar sort of person. Flem is unheroic, acquisitive, cruel; nothing human or lovely can flourish within the scope of his blighting influence. It seems to me not a little remarkable that the actual descriptions

of these two characters have certain points of similarity: Flem had "bright, quick, amoral eyes like a chipmunk"; Hovenden's facial expression, reproduced in the grandchild when he destroyed the butterfly, had a "certain odd sagacity," and of the child at the moment when he most perfectly reincarnated his grandfather, Robert Danforth whispered to his wife, "How wise the little monkey looks!"

Contrasted with villains like Flem Snopes and Jason Compson are the idiot Benjy and the Negress Dilsey, who are beatified at the Easter Service, where Benjy sat "rapt in his sweet blue gaze," and Dilsey cried "rigidly and quietly in the annealment and the blood of the remembered lamb." These redemptive characters, these symbols of innocence and goodness, stand at the opposite pole from the Jasons and the Snopeses, and point the way to Christ and salvation.

Hawthorne has no characters quite like Benjy and Dilsey. His chief exemplar of pure innocence is the early Donatello. But the problem of evil dominates the works of both writers. Both writers are concerned with the fall of man, with man's struggle toward redemption, with the regeneration occasioned by sin itself, with the *felix culpa*. "Is sin, then, like sorrow," Kenyon asks in *The Marble Faun*, "an element of human education, through which we struggle to a higher and purer state than we could otherwise have attained?" It is a question which might be inscribed as an epigraph to the writings of both Hawthorne and Faulkner.

For man's struggle toward redemption is the grand subject of both. Faulkner said in the Stockholm speech, "I believe that man will prevail." A reviewer in the *New Yorker* magazine professed to be puzzled by the word *prevail*, and decided that it is vague and meaningless. I would suggest, however, that it might be helpful to look up the word in Cruden's *Concordance* to the Bible, and then read the passages (there are 65 altogether) in

which it occurs. In general, *prevail* occurs in contexts where a victory is won with God's help. *Prevail*, as Faulkner uses it, has nothing to do with modern technology; it is a Biblical word, and has a religious, or Biblical, connotation.

Prevailing in Faulkner is never an easy matter. His protagonists are nearly always surrounded by hell and high water. But they tower, they enhance our conception of the human potential. This is perhaps what John Crowe Ransom meant when he said that Faulkner shows us man "under the aspect of magnificence."

Does Hawthorne ever quite show us man under the aspect of magnificence? Do his important actors ever quite tower? There is indeed a more marked heroic strain in Faulkner; moving accidents by flood and field; battle, murder, and sudden death. Faulkner's characters have a Shakespearean super-stature which Hawthorne's characters seem to lack. It would be untrue, however, to say that Hawthorne's characters totally lack this kind of appeal. I shall not call the roll, looking for candidates, but content myself with nominating one person to stand with the battle-scarred, distraught, bedeviled heroes of Faulkner—Arthur Dimmesdale. Arthur's stature, it seems to me, has been greatly underestimated. While his paramour has been admired for her strength, Arthur has been despised for his weakness, yet Hester never did anything which required a tithe of the courage which Arthur's last sermon and confession required. If he walked less firmly than Hester, his burden was much heavier. Hester's struggle with the community was infinitely less torturous than Arthur's struggle with himself. It is a far cry—at least on the surface—from Arthur Dimmesdale to Joe Christmas, but Dimmesdale is perhaps the one Hawthorne character who can be compared with Christmas, who would have understood him, and who exemplifies with something approaching Faulknerian power the destruction wrought by civil

war within the soul.

We read these two writers allegorically. This approach to Hawthorne was recognized almost from the start, but it was not at first recognized as appropriate to Faulkner, because many readers insisted (and some perhaps still insist) upon reading him as sociology, as a report on "conditions" in the South. But his work now, like Hawthorne's, is seen by most readers to be not so much a sociological record of a particular region, as a report on the human race. Recent criticism has done much to elaborate and enrich the symbolical interpretation of both Hawthorne and Faulkner. The last decade or so has been indeed a golden age in criticism for both of these authors. More than most authors, both Faulkner and Hawthorne compel a symbolical reading.

We see these two writers, finally, as working in the orthodox Christian tradition, a tradition which posits original sin. It doesn't much matter, perhaps, whether the tradition is called Protestant or Catholic, Calvinist or Augustinian, though it is probably true that both authors (whether consciously or not) hark back to a view of Man and God which is older than the Protestant movement. Adherence to such a tradition was

natural enough in Hawthorne's case (despite the heresies of the romantic age which surrounded him) because of his strong hereditary sense. Faulkner's adherence is not surprising either (despite the naturalistic amorality which dominated the early decades of this century) because certain fundamentalist beliefs had persisted longer in the South than elsewhere, and naturalism as a philosophy had failed to gain much of a foothold there. Religious liberals can with justice affix the label "Reactionary" to Hawthorne and Faulkner alike.

Faulkner said in the Stockholm speech that "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat." The remark is curiously reminiscent of Hawthorne, who said in the famous "Preface" to *The House of the Seven Gables* that the fiction writer "sins unpardonably" if he deviates from "the truth of the human heart." The business of writers like Hawthorne and Faulkner (as indeed of Shakespeare himself) is not to change the world, but to describe the human condition, to anatomize the human heart, to contemplate our common imperfections.

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## The Wild Palms of Hester Prynne

But Hester Prynne, with a mind of native courage and activity, and for so long a period not merely estranged, but outlawed, from society, had habituated herself to such latitude of speculation. . . . She had wandered, without rule or guidance, in a moral wilderness; as vast, as intricate and shadowy, as the untamed forest. . . . Her intellect and heart had their home, as it were, in desert places, where she roamed as freely as the wild Indian in his woods. For years past she had looked from this estranged point of view at human institutions, . . . criticising all with hardly more reverence than the Indian would feel for the clerical band, the judicial robe, the pillory, the gallows, the fireside, or the church. The tendency of her fate and fortunes had been to set her free. The scarlet letter was her passport into regions where other women dared not tread. Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers,—stern and wild ones,—and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss.

*The Scarlet Letter*, Chapter 18



# Hawthorne amid the Alien Corn

HENRY G. FAIRBANKS

HENRY ADAMS' image of an American Venus buried under fig leaves vividly dramatized the loss of creative power which followed a general retreat from the senses. For the suspicion of the sensuous which cut Americans off from the power latent in sex served also to sever them from another source of vitality—that normally concretized in the fine arts. The image-breakers of the Reformation who had smashed the faces of cathedral statuary were, ironically, remodeling these ancient representations according to the fragmentary lineaments of modern man. But supplementing the repressive influence of this Calvinistic shadow which was receding in the nineteenth century was a second force which conspired to constrict man's creative faculty within purely utilitarian moulds. This derived from the materialism imposed by the harsh conditions of pioneer life where leisure was treason and where elementary pragmatism determined the standards of excellence.

Between these two forces art was not crushed outright. It was merely dislodged from the important role which Nature had assigned to it. It was for the ladies. It was for man's idle moments. But it had no serious part in the business of life. It might find some grudging acceptance as the handmaiden of sentimental piety. It might claim some patronage as a cultural clothier where the best families shopped for genteel occasions. But as a source of power within the community it was quite ineffectual. Its spokesmen found it more congenial to go to Rome, or to the Left Bank, to sustain self-respect and to inspire creativity; and thus began a long tradition of expatriation, from Hawthorne's day to the 1930's, which has brought down upon our artists' heads the accusation of being treasonable irresponsibles. Something of

the extent to which Hawthorne had been "exiled" by his dedication to art may be seen from a brief review of his career as an author. This may, in turn, shed some light on the alienation of other American artists from their place in the community.

In the introductory essay to *The Scarlet Letter* not even the good-natured resignation of Hawthorne's reference to the disapprobation of his ancestors can wholly conceal his protest against their narrowness toward his art. As he recalled the Draconian severity of old Major John Hathorne and of Colonel William Hawthorne he thought:

Doubtless, however, either of these stern and black-browed Puritans would have thought it quite a sufficient retribution for his sins, that . . . the old trunk of the family tree . . . should have borne, as its topmost bough, an idler like myself. . . . "What is he?" murmurs one gray shadow of my forefathers to the other. "A writer of story-books! . . . Why, the degenerate fellow might as well have been a fiddler!" (*Works*, Riverside Edition, V, 25)

In "Passages from a Relinquished Work" (1832) Hawthorne repeats this contrast between his ancestors and himself in another scene of variance—between a youth ambitious to become an author and the boy's guardian, Parson Thumpcushion. Though charge and guardian differed on a thousand points, the breaking point came over the choice of a profession. Because he was independent, as the heir "to a moderate competence," the youth had avowed his intentions "of keeping aloof from the regular business of life." Now, this "would have been a dangerous resolution anywhere in the world." But "it was fatal in New England" (II, 459):

There is a grossness in the conceptions of my countrymen; they will not be convinced

that any good thing may consist with what they call idleness; . . . I had a quick sensitiveness to public opinion, and felt as if it ranked me with the tavern haunTERS and town paupers. . . . The consequence of all this was a piece of lighthearted desperation.

That piece of "light-hearted desperation" was an idea, suggested in another Hawthorne story a year or two before, "of becoming a wandering story teller" (II, 460). When the would-be author had embarked on it the first time, it was, significantly, in a company of wanderers—"The Seven Vagabonds" (1830). Even among these outcasts, however, he was not to know the camaraderie which made their nomadic existence tolerable. With a certain professional pride of membership, they questioned the credentials of a writer as a basis for admission; for the writer, as writer, was neither fish nor fowl—though as minister he would be revered; as teacher, respected; as statesman, acclaimed. Now, as the youth reverted to his original idea and set out once more on a bard's career, he sensed a little shame himself in a project which seemed about as much like work as "catching butterflies" (II, 460).

That "grossness" of his countrymen which rendered them insensitive to the place of the artist was a fairly constant complaint in Hawthorne. In "The Hall of Fantasy" one character said to another of artists in general, "We gaze at him as if he had no business among us, and question whether he is fit for any of our pursuits" (II, 200). When the Shaker runaways of "The Canterbury Pilgrims" were confronted by a poet seeking admission to their community, they were perplexed by the very name *poet*. They innocently wondered if the elders were likely to receive a poet, for they admitted "nobody that has not a gift to be useful" (III, 523).

Logically, this grossness which could not grasp the artist's utility could hardly appreciate the artist's method. The "critic" in "Main Street" was Haw-

thorne's caricature of the crude audiences with which the imaginative author had constantly to deal. By insisting on strict literalism in everything, the critic short-circuited every flight of the illustrated lecture which the showman was attempting. When the showman mildly protested that, because human art has its limitations, we must require a little aid from the imagination, the critic replied, "You will get no such aid from mine! I make it a point to see things precisely as they are" (III, 442).

It is noticeable that the selections just quoted suggest a definite trend in Hawthorne's early visualization of his art—that is, the close identification which he makes between artist and showman. His tendency to regard the author's function as dramatic derives, in part, from the glamor which strolling players represent for youth chafing against conventionalism; and partly from Hawthorne's awareness of how far removed from respectable society the "professional" writer was in his day. Hence, consciously and unconsciously, his conception of the artist began to conform to a popular picture still surviving—the long-haired esthete, sensitive to the verge of effeminacy, romantically homeless, but wandering adventurously, fed on inspiration and improvising with the greatest of ease. It was fundamentally an amateur's notion of the kind we are not surprised to discover in provincial Hawthorne. But what made its weakness more volatile still were the elements of shame and self-criticism with which it was compounded. The hostility of New England and America half-convinced Hawthorne that he was a "fiddler" whose chief purpose was diversion. He often fell into the role completely and curried favor with his readers by jibing "asides" made at his own expenses.

The image of the theater has multiple forms throughout his work. In "Fancy's Show Box" conscience is symbolized by a private pictorial exhibition not dissimilar to the public display of "Main Street"

(I, 250-257, *passim*). In "Ethan Brand" the diorama of the old Jew figures prominently in the foreground (III, 489-492). In "The Seven Vagabonds" Hawthorne expresses a passé troubadour ideal showing the extent of his compromise with the supernumerary position to which social prejudice had relegated the artist: "My design, in short, was to imitate the story-tellers of whom Oriental travellers have told us, and become an itinerant novelist, reciting my own extemporaneous fictions to such audiences as I could collect" (I, 409). (Significant of Hawthorne's appraisal of the artist is the composition of his knot of vagabonds: showman, beggar, fiddling foreigner, dancer, salesman, and Indian.)

In "Passages from a Relinquished Work," where the Story-Teller is "concocting" to the tattoo of the toddy stick in a bar, the description of the little theater there has the authenticity of a primitive painting. The vigor of Hawthorne's sketch leaves little doubt about his knowledge, or enjoyment, of such scenes: the two fiddles and clarinet, the stamping audience, the flourished red bandanas, the horse play, the commentary on the tricks of the trade, the young persons of "doubtful sex" in the company, the benches collapsed beneath the tumult of applause (II, 472-473). All this is as alive as today's straw-hat circuit.

By extension the theatrical image is multiplied in Hawthorne's well-known penchant for dramatic groupings ("casts" of four in his major romances); in his recurring tableaux, or set scenes; and in the generally heightened, rather than mimetic, quality of his dialogue—all of which tends to achieve its compositional effects by a through-the-proscenium artificiality associated with the stage. His mastery of *chiaroscuro* owes much to an inclination to think in terms of stage-lighting. (F. O. Matthiessen speaks of Hawthorne's "way of developing his plot by means of a few spot-lighted scenes.") His employment of color, according to Leland Schubert, "is

an emotional element rather than a merely descriptive one," utilized like the properties of a stage set for the creation of mood. He delights in processions.<sup>1</sup> His color is spectacular. His descriptions, like the following of Judge Pyncheon dead in *The House of the Seven Gables* (III, 328-329), often read like stage directions: "The northwest wind has swept the sky clear. The window is distinctly seen. Through its panes, moreover, we dimly catch the sweep of the dark clustering foliage, . . . the moonbeams fall aslant into the room. They play over the Judge's figure. . . . They gleam upon his watch."

"Young Goodman Brown" presents an interesting parallel to Eugene O'Neill's handling of *The Emperor Jones*. The fears of the Puritan, as of the primitive, well up from his subconscious against the background of the forest. In both, the vividness of phantasms blurs the distinction between real and unreal. The New England forest, like the West Indian jungle, is alive and menacing. The emotions of both protagonists rise in artfully conducted crescendo that culminates in the whine of the silver bullet for one and for the other, the equally mortal cry, "My Faith is gone!" Then the wilderness and silence again, more ominous in terror lurking just beneath an innocent surface.

This peripheral-artificial role which the community allotted to him was such that the power latent in the American artist was dangerously stifled. Almost of necessity Hawthorne found himself reluctantly acquiescing in the public's estimate of what he should be. But as early as 1832—even when he seemed reconciled to playing the part of an entertainer living precariously on the fringe of respectable society—he had acknowledged the stern exactions and lofty character involved in creative effort.

<sup>1</sup> See "Endicott and the Red Cross" (I, 485-494), "Howe's Masquerade" (I, 272-290), "The Procession of Life" (II, 235-252), and *The Scarlet Letter* (V, 281-285).

Hitherto I had immensely underrated the difficulties of my idle trade; now I recognized that it demanded nothing short of my whole power, . . . exerted with the same prodigality as if I were speaking . . . for the nation at large on the floor of the Capitol. . . . Not that I ever hoped to be thus qualified. . . . It is one of my few sources of pride, that, ridiculous as the object was, I followed it up with the firmness and energy of a man. (II, 469)

Owen Warland, the Artist of the Beautiful (once Hawthorne's ideal in many ways), also came finally to assert a force of character which hardly seemed compatible with his delicacy (II, 512). Not only did Warland persevere in his work without the sympathy of uncomprehending men, but he renounced any possessiveness of it when a destructive child had misconceived his mechanical butterfly as a toy (II, 535-536): "When the artist rose high enough to achieve the beautiful, the symbol by which he had made it perceptible . . . became of little value in his eyes while his spirit possessed itself in the enjoyment of reality."

But, intermingled with this strength of the Artist of the Beautiful, there were so many negative features of the century's conception of the artist that it is plain that Hawthorne had partly accepted them, too—the too familiar features of the fragile esthete who pursued the beautiful and shunned the ugly with almost feminine emotion. Whether Hawthorne embodied it in Owen Warland, in Clifford Pyncheon, in Dimmesdale, or in Colcord (*Doctor Grimshawe's Secret*), it was an image which has done much in our masculine society to confuse sensibility with weakness and "temperament" with talent.

Owen Warland, for example, had a "delicate ingenuity" which produced "pretty" shapes in wood, "principally figures of flowers and birds, . . . always for purposes of grace. . . ." He was "completely refined from all utilitarian coarseness. . . ." He turned "pale and grew sick" at the sight of a steam engine, "as if something monstrous and unnatural

had been presented to him." The character of Owen's mind was "microscopic, and tended naturally to the minute, in accordance with his diminutive frame and the marvellous smallness of his fingers" (II, 507). In the presence of Robert Danforth, the bluff, earth-bound smith of the story, "the influence of brute force" quite unnerved him (II, 509).

Clifford Pyncheon is another example of the neurotic esthete representative of this false notion of sensitivity. Likewise, Clifford incarnates an idea still vulgarly current that the artist is incapable of facing reality. Hawthorne even suggests that Clifford's condition involves derangement of that ambivalent sort which the cult of the "high-strung" easily twists into one of the sure badges of genius. Hawthorne does not idealize Clifford, though he lends him his dressing gown, his features, and some of his habits. But the deliberate contrast between Clifford, the hyper-sensitive failure, and Judge Pyncheon, the successful politician, like the black-and-white juxtaposition of Owen Warland and Robert Danforth, makes the severance of the artist from the man of affairs bafflingly complete.

A corroding self-pity, moreover, limns the morbid portrait of Clifford—a self-pity which we can believe, sympathetically, marked Hawthorne especially during the ten years that followed his graduation from Bowdoin. For Clifford is described as one who "saw . . . that he was an example and representative of that great class of people whom an inexplicable providence is continually putting at cross-purposes with the world. . . ." It broke what seemed its own promise in their nature: "withholding their proper food, . . . and . . . making their existence a strangeness, a solitude, and a torment" (III, 181). For earlier events had revealed in Clifford "a certain fine temper . . . imperfectly betrayed, of which it was the function to deal with all beautiful and enjoyable things."

Beauty would be his life; his aspirations



would all tend toward it. . . . Such a man should have nothing to do with sorrow; . . . nothing with the martyrdom which, . . . awaits those who have the heart . . . to fight a battle with the world. (134)

But Clifford's affinity with Owen Warland is most evident from what can be called their case-histories. They have the same exposed nervous system. It made Clifford avert his eyes with "instinctive" caution from the odd "uncouthness" of hapless Hepzibah (164-165). It brought tears to his eyes when "his sensibilities were shocked by the "horrible ugliness, spiritual as well as physical," of an organ-grinder's monkey (198). The jangling of the shop-bell upset him (139). The mere proximity of robustious cousin Jaffrey reduced him to "an absolute palsy of fear" (207). But flowers and humming birds gladdened his heart, the former with so exquisite a feeling that it seemed "not so much a taste as an emotion." His affection for flowers was, in fact, "almost exclusively a woman's trait" (178-180, *passim*). But, on occasion, some of his traits were obviously those of a child—blowing bubbles, for instance (206).

By 1850, however, when Hawthorne was engaged in the composition of *The House of the Seven Gables*, he had advanced beyond the period at the Old Manse when he had delineated his precious Artist of the Beautiful. That accounts for his criticism of Clifford's gourmandizing as a less agreeable manifestation of sybaritism. With a hint of self-accusation he had written of Clifford (135): "It is even possible . . . that if Clifford . . . had enjoyed the means of cultivating his taste to its utmost perfectibility, that subtle attribute might . . . have completely eaten out or filed away his affections." Nevertheless, he was still tending to connect the beautiful with the ineffectual. How often must he have said to himself in the tones of Jaffrey Pyncheon to Clifford: "What! Still blowing soap bubbles!"

When he came to criticize his own

works in his maturity, Hawthorne was aware of the extent to which they had been cut off from the mainstream of life. In the preface to the second edition of *Twice Told Tales* he expressed no surprise that the first edition had gained so slight a vogue. The stories had "the pale tint of flowers that blossomed in too retired a shade" (I, 16). In "The Old Manse" he confessed that the great expectations which he had hoped would ripen in the New Eden of Concord and marriage "had never come to light." For the tales in *Mosses from an Old Manse* also reminded him of flowers—"old, faded things," like "flowers pressed between the leaves of a book" (II, 45-46, *passim*). Of one particular tale ("Rappaccini's Daughter") he made a detailed criticism, ostensibly of his alleged foreign author, M. de l'Aubepine, but plainly of himself and his writings generally. Again he admitted that they were "the faintest possible counterfeit of real life" (II, 108).

In "Drowne's Wooden Image," the story of a New England craftsman who reached the stature of an artist only once in his career (when he worked directly from life, with an unwonted passion and love), Hawthorne had attributed Drowne's mediocrity partly to "the dearth of professional sympathy" in Drowne's native Boston (II, 351). That explanation for their difficulties has been a fairly constant complaint among American artists from Freneau through T. S. Eliot. Soon Hawthorne, almost in the words that Henry James was to use later, was lamenting the sterility of his native soil for the production of works of art. "In the old countries, . . . a certain conventional privilege seems to be awarded to the romancer; his work is not put exactly side by side with nature. . . ." This was the atmosphere that the American writer needed. Without it, the creations of fancy left "the paint and pasteboard of their composition but too painfully discernible" (V, 321-322). Later, looking back upon America from Europe, he explained that

Italy was so valuable to him because there "actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon as they are, and must needs be, in America" (VI, 15).

But this abandonment of America for a milieu more hospitable to the artist's growth was an ironic development in the Hawthorne who had boyishly bragged that his writings might someday be "equal to the proudest productions of the scribbling sons of John Bull,"<sup>2</sup> who had entitled his first projected work *Seven Tales of My Native Land*, who had longed for (if not to be) "the Master Genius" that would create an American literature, "hewing it

. . . out of the unwrought granite of our intellectual quarries" (II, 79).

Yet the life of the artist in America had severed him from society and from reality. Not only had it consigned him to the emasculating circle of dilettantism, but it had partly persuaded him to accept the artificial role committed to the artist. In the preface to *Twice Told Tales* he had confessed his self-imprisonment. His reputation as an "exceedingly sensitive, and not very forcible man" was partly his own making in a desire "to act in consonance with the charter assigned to him" (I, 18). Yet this, like Arthur Dimmesdale's gnawing suppression of the truth, was that falseness which "steals the pith and substance out of whatever realities there are around us" (V, 177). It made Hawthorne restless at home. It made him a wanderer between two worlds and an "outsider" in both of them.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Mrs. Elizabeth Hawthorne, dated Salem, 13 March 1821; quoted with permission from the letters at Yale University assembled by Prof. Norman Holmes Pearson and his colleagues for their forthcoming edition of Hawthorne's correspondence.

## The Artist of the Beautiful

It is a good lesson—though it may often be a hard one—for a man who has dreamed of literary fame, and of making for himself a rank among the world's dignitaries by such means, to step aside out of the narrow circle in which his claims are recognized, and to find how utterly devoid of significance, beyond that circle, is all that he achieves, and all he aims at.

HAWTHORNE, "The Custom House"

Four precepts: To break off customs; to shake off spirits ill-disposed; to meditate on youth; to do nothing against one's genius.

HAWTHORNE, Notebooks, 1835

## The Second Secret in The Scarlet Letter

ROBERT F. HAUGH

HAWTHORNE's penchant for tableaux, symptom of his static imagination, has often been remarked. *The Scarlet Letter* has three central ones, the scaffold scenes at beginning, middle and end of the book. The first two are static, it is true. They are posed bits of statuary with the central figures all present in meaningful postures. The first one is at noon, and the sun blazes down upon the girl and her lover while the husband lurks darkly in the crowd. The second is at night, and a sign appears in the sky while Hester, Dimmesdale, and Pearl stand forming a magic chain on the scaffold while Chillingworth stands in a shadow and glares. But the third, on election day, is not a static tableau. It is tense with energy and activity, for Dimmesdale leads the perplexed and unwilling Hester up the steps and there on the scaffold for the third time, finds strength to bare his tormented soul.

The first two tableaux have their energies in the first secret of the book, the secret which Austin Warren has called, rightly, a postulate outside of and prior to the framework of the novel. It is not really the first secret which energizes the action of the novel, although it creates a field of force through which other energizing acts must move. The second secret, the one Hester agrees to keep for her husband, is really the motive force for nearly all the movement of the novel, the dynamic changed relationships which at last bring all to realization of the moral consequences of their acts.

At this point I must pay my respects to John C. Gerber and in the same breath take my departure from him. In his splendid essay (*NEQ*, 17, 1944), accurately inclining himself toward the dynamic

movement of the book through the several characters who in turn furnish the motive power, he nevertheless misses the surcharged relationship implicit in the second secret. The secret is arranged in Chapter Four, in the very middle of those chapters which Mr. Gerber assigns to the community as motive force. It is true that this secret, as well as the first, is to be kept from the community; but this is not the primary reason for it, nor does it operate in a community sense as does the first. The power for evil of the secret is that it is directed against Dimmesdale, Hester's most cherished personal relative. Hester, we discover at the end of the book, does not respond to a sense of community responsibility; only when she sees that she, personally, has conspired to kill her lover does she have any sense of responsibility at all. The second secret is the origin of that conspiracy.

The community, too, unwittingly conspires, for it implements Chillingworth's personal revenge against the man who has wronged him; but this conspiracy also is a product of the second secret.

The final flow of the action begins in Chapter 12, when the minister mounts to the scaffold at night, seeking ease of soul. Ostensibly he has come hoping to unburden himself of his secret; we know from the events of the previous chapter that his soul, tormented to anguished writhings by the fiend always at his elbow, has driven him there to shriek out at night. There Hester finds him; there she is shocked, after seven years, to see his emaciation of body and the weakness of his moral force. After leaving him, Hester begins the first stirrings of moral responsibility. Hester sees a train of circumstances hidden from all others and

"seems to see that there lay upon her a responsibility, in reference to the clergyman, which she owed to no other, nor to the whole world besides." Her first steps along the road to morality cause her to recognize the immorality of her act. After the chapter which Hawthorne gives to examination of changes in her nature, epitomized in the line, "The scarlet letter had not done its office" (signifying the failure of church and community sanctions), Hawthorne immediately sets Hester in motion to "redeem her error" which is not the first, but the second error. She goes at once to Chillingworth and charges him with fiendish activities; she resolves to reveal to Arthur the nature of her second secret. In the old man, as he crept up the path upon leaving her, Hester saw her own dark nature. Conspiracy with the old man is a visible evil; recognition of that "threw a dark light on Hester's state of mind, revealing much that she might not otherwise have acknowledged to herself."

Without pause, the action moves into the forest meeting of Hester and Arthur. Here the first revelation of a secret in *The Scarlet Letter* takes place. She confesses, humbly begs his forgiveness, and smothers his natural anger in her bosom. "Hester would not set him free, lest he should look her sternly in the face." Here, even as in the market place, she refuses to see her moral responsibility. Nor does she ever; it must be shown to her by Arthur's actions. She loses her initiative by this act of confession; she no longer moves the story, but is carried along by the strength of forces unleashed by the evil of the second secret. As an aside, Pearl's role as "visible conscience" must be laid to rest. Here in the forest Pearl acts out her last symbol in refusing to come to her mother until Hester resumes the scarlet. *A.* Yet, note well, Hester puts on the letter, but does not change by a fraction her intention to run away with Arthur. Pearl does not, at the last, bring her mother to time; she does not act as

visible conscience, nor as any other moral force to help her mother and Arthur find a way out of their moral wilderness. Public sanctions fail through her, as elsewhere.

Arthur it is who now assumes the role of strength, and the source of his strength is implicit in the second secret. Not a visible conscience, but a visible Satan gives him his energy. Coming out of the forest, his reaction, like Hester's, is to behave with an evil power. Then comes the long night during which he rewrites the Election sermon, and the events of the next day, culminating in the amazing moment when he takes Hester by the hand and draws her to the scaffold for the last time. The source of that astonishing energy is the visible evil—just as Hester's first revelation of a secret came from recognition of personal evil with which she had conspired. It is much easier to say "get thee behind me" to a visible Satan than to an amorphous and tormenting awareness of guilt. Part of Arthur's strength of purpose comes, it is true, from the ritual of the church in this day of all the church days in the year. Garbed in his robes, bulwarked by his institutions and his rituals, Arthur moves in a processional strength. His march up the scaffold steps is a continuation, in a way, of his ecclesiastical movement. When old Roger comes from the crowd to grasp Arthur's arm and say, "Madman, hold! What is your purpose?" and Arthur answers, "Ha, tempter! . . . With God's help I shall escape thee now!" the energy of the second secret ceases to move the story. Arthur's confession now brings once more the first secret, the initial postulate, back into the book, and with that tableau the major action of *The Scarlet Letter* comes to rest. It is for reasons connected with Hester's second secret that the book now seems over, that the events to follow, which bring Hester back to Boston finally, now aware of her personal moral responsibility, seem like falling action.

It seems clear now, why the situations

formed around the first secret are static; why the first tableaux are still-life. Only when man struggles against the evil cause of his fall does moral energy move mankind. The initial postulate is the eternal situation of mankind, driven from the Garden by his act. Only when he moves against the second secret, aware now of his mortal nature and of his tempter, does he have the energy to rise. The "magnetic bond of humanity" is after all a divine energy open only to those who have fallen but who, unlike Young Goodman Brown, do not stay down. Now, with this aspect

of *The Scarlet Letter* before us, we seem perilously close to a Hegelian conception of the necessity of evil which so alarms some readers of *The Marble Faun*. Yet a perusal of most of Hawthorne's stories will reveal that evil moves them; that the "magnetic bond" operates best when an evil counterforce moves across it. Only thus is the divine nature of man energized. And it is usually energized, as here, in an individual relationship (the second secret), not in a public relationship (the *Scarlet Letter*).

### Polarity

Four worlds diagonally arranged,  
Eternity flanged:

Two spiritual, two fleshly, yet  
Transversely set.

The angelical and the devilish, one:  
The fire, the sun.

The saintly and the swinish, the other:  
God and brother.

Yet the angelical and the swinish, matched  
Are often hatched;

And the devilish and the saintly blend  
From end to end.

So that few men are devils and swine:  
Those do not twine.

Still fewer are both angel and saint:  
That taint is faint.

But most of us are saint and devil;  
And polar evil

Discharges, in the angelical line,  
Angelical swine.

RALPH GORDON



# Henry James and "The Personal Equation"

HAROLD T. MCCARTHY

HENRY JAMES'S apprenticeship as a writer was similar to that of many other writers in that he first sought to imitate well-established novelists and then, progressively, evolved his personal idiom. But where James differed sharply from most of the writers of his day and of those who followed him was in the extent to which he deliberately cultivated his personal expression of things. Victorian novelists in general tended to reproduce similar plot-situations; familiar character-types met the usual difficulties and resolved them in a fairly predictable way. The exponents of naturalism, who were very much to the fore by the end of the century, brought to the novel a vast catalogue of items that had previously been omitted. The "new" novelists, like their predecessors, said a great many things that were worth saying about human nature and social conditions. But like their predecessors they, too, were usually content to portray characters in conflict with the accepted framework of values that existed around them. The artist knew where he stood; he felt assured in his knowledge of his own character and could proceed upon reasonably well established principles with regard to general human nature in writing his novel.

It is very apparent from James's observations upon his art that he proceeded with no such assurance of certain certainties. Rather, he viewed the human situations that provided him with his *données* as problems to which no conventional system of moral algebra could be applied. Each problem required a separate inspection. The more difficulties the problem posed, the better, because in the sensitive process of analysis, a process

that could take several years, James found that he made illuminating discoveries about his experiences as well as about his own nature. He described the act of writing fiction as an "act of life," and it was an act that was creative in two ways: it created a work of art that bore in every part the evidence of his personal sense of things, and as a result of the deep, intense probing of his personal values, it inevitably created afresh his ethical ideal and its claims upon his self-identity. After the experience of, for example, *The Wings of the Dove*, he could indeed say with Kate Croy, "We shall never be again as we were!"

At the bottom of many of James's ideas can be found the common element of his belief in the essential importance of the individual. In criticism he sought the critic's personal felt response to literature and it was because he found such a large measure of this quality in the work of Matthew Arnold and Sainte-Beuve that he admired them. He sought always in fiction to possess himself of each writer's particular "window," the unique vantage-point from which that writer regarded life. James treasured a sense of the past because, in part, it enabled him to share the differing perspectives of men who belonged to another age. In *The Altar of the Dead* he protested against a dense, materialistic society, wedded to the immediate and finite, that allowed death to cut off callously the fine awareness of individual personality.

The characters in James's fiction are often in opposition to the forces in modern society that do not recognize any necessity to preserve moral integrity. Isabel Archer's respect for the marriage vow,

the sacredness Fleda Vetch attaches to the engagement bond, Lambert Strether's conviction that he must not personally gain anything from his embassy—all seem far-fetched only when the preservation of a carefully wrought moral integrity is considered of lesser value than the pursuit of happiness. In each case James has struggled with the problem of self-identity and has come through with the solution that, whatever renunciation may be involved, these characters must act in the way they do if the complex of values which constitutes their moral personality is not to be violated.

James's refusal to be satisfied with the surface character of individuals and his insistence upon diving into complicated moral depths is directly connected with his effort to salvage the "person." This effort draws its strength from his view of the world as material for change. It was his opinion that the artist can regard the world with reference to what he would like it to be. James not only attacked the naturalistic novel on the ground that its selection of material was highly arbitrary, that it presented only the worst aspects of human behavior, but he also opposed its determinism. In electing to present "the other side of the coin," James took full cognizance of evil and ugly aspects of life, but chose to expend his talent upon emphasizing an ethical ideal. He wrote of Zola's *La Joie de Vivre*: "granting the nature of the curiosity and the substance laboured in, the patience is again prodigious, but which makes us wonder what pearl of philosophy, of suggestion or just of homely recognition, the general picture, as of rats dying in a hole, has to offer."

Such a writer as Zola, James would argue, must have some sense of a better way of life in order to react so violently against the sordidness he encountered. However rare his glimpses of the finer state of things might have been, they were still just as real as the familiar vulgarities. How much better, it seemed to James,

to explore one's reaction against evil and ugliness and present the "possible other case." The artist could shape from his own moral reaction a transforming ideal and make the experience afforded by his art an ennobling one. Since the artist is free to shape his material as he sees fit, it seemed much better to James for him to dwell upon those qualities he valued most in himself than to dwell upon those which tended to equate him with animals. James recognized a capacity in man to re-order his existence, to shape his conduct and his values in accord with a chosen ethos.

James's plea to artists that they should give their personal sense of things in their work was not a plea for "self-expression" as that term is generally understood. He did not try to express his "self" but to express those of his impressions which bore some relation to human culture and were of general interest and significance. This process amounted to self-expression, perhaps, but it was far different from the disordered emotionalism usually comprehended by that term. As James pondered the relation between the artist and his art, it seemed to him that the latter was worthwhile in direct proportion to the extent it embodied each artist's unique vision of life.

James's desire that the artist should stress the finer aspect of human conduct was not at all incompatible with his conviction that the artist should be true to all of his experience. He believed that the question was one of selection, treatment, and emphasis. These factors had inevitably to operate and James found it grotesque that they should operate so overwhelmingly in favor of the ugly. Too often artists were not true to their feelings, the moral truth indicated by their reactions, when they reproduced hideous characters and settings. They were being true to the conditions that brought about the impression and neglecting the really important matter of the impression itself.

If James had not had his belief in the

need for each artist to choose and express his own subject-matter, he might have found it easier to accept the manner in which society interfered to prescribe what material was suitable for artistic treatment. As it was, he bitterly resented society's intrusion into the matter. He repeatedly set forth his position. In "The Art of Fiction" he complained that there was an unfortunate discrepancy between that which the people knew and that which they would admit to knowing, between that which they felt to be a part of life and that which they would allow to enter into literature. The so-called "moral purpose" which was presumed to be exhibited in the English novel by restricting subject-matter to topics acceptable for adolescents impressed James as quite the reverse of an accomplishment in the field of morals. "The essence of moral energy," he wrote, "is to survey the whole field."

The position James takes on the relation of morality to art in "The Art of Fiction" is a development of his idea of a "moral sense." He had early distinguished between the practice of moralizing and the operation of a moral element in the novel. It was not until he approached his major phase, however, that he stopped searching for a "moral sense," *per se*, in the novel and came to regard the moral quality of the work as an inseparable aspect of the artist's personal awareness.

From this viewpoint, no work of art could have a deep moral quality unless its producer had a correspondingly deep moral sense. The same applied to the artistic stature of a work of art; it would correspond to the artistic sense of the artist. The moral sense and the artistic sense lay very close together in that "the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer." The operation of the moral sense as well as the artistic sense was intuitive, spontaneous. James pointed out that individuals such as Hawthorne, Emerson, Charles Eliot Norton, and Wil-

liam Wetmore Story persistently displayed the nature of their spiritual ancestry even when they were most concerned with art. Even when they tried to lose themselves in the labyrinth of delight, they held fast to the clue of duty. In a larger sense, this was true of Turgenev also, and his work offered to James "a capital example of moral meaning giving a sense to form and form giving relief to moral meaning."

Work such as Turgenev's illustrated for James that the only way to communicate moral ideas in fiction is to communicate them as an intrinsic part of the experience provided the reader by the novel. If there were no concern with the moral aspects of life guiding the author in his first perception of the *donnée*, in his reflection upon it and in his expression of it, there could be no reason to expect moral value as part of the final effect. If the vision of the author and the pressure of his will were conditioned by a moral sense, the finished work would embody a moral quality aesthetically and it would be offered to the reader with all the added power and beauty effected by art.

Conflicts involving moral values are easily amongst the most profound in human experience, and art can communicate such conflicts. But this is only possible, according to James, when the mind of the artist is capable of piercing the superficial and misleading to seize upon what he can recognize as true and beautiful. Laws, customs, all *a priori* guides are of only incidental value in such a search. James relished those situations wherein it was exceedingly difficult to distinguish right from wrong. In the course of resolving such a predicament, he took pains on several occasions to illustrate the inadequacy of judgments based on predetermined positions. The final court of appeal, to his mind, was what may be described as the conscience, aided with every resource of the reflective intelligence. It was the nature of the individual that counted.

A failure to appreciate the nature of the relationship between the artist and his work was one of the most serious charges James brought against the advocates of "art for art's sake." It seemed to him that they displayed a marked provincialism of spirit, in contrast to their assumed culture, when they spoke of morality and art as though the former were something one could add to, or keep out of, the latter at will. James contended that moral quality had everything to do with the importance of a work of art and that it was impossible to decide arbitrarily to keep this quality out of a work of art or to insert it. There could be no doubt, he averred, of what the great artists would say on this matter. "People of that temper feel that the whole thinking man is one. . . ."

The contention that each artist should express his view of life in his own way, imparting to it the fullest measure of his individual quality, assumed a primary importance for James towards the close of the century when he determined to allow himself all the stylistic freedom the expression of his material required. He had sincere and enthusiastic admiration for the widely differing styles of many of his contemporaries. The more their writing bore the impress of their personality, indeed, the more he treasured it, for this gave him a greater opportunity to extend the range of his own experience. One of the reasons why James felt so keenly H. G. Wells's parody of him (*Boon*) was that it seemed to indicate that Wells had been totally unable to accept the conditions of James's personal viewpoint, that he even found it "ridiculous and vacuous."

On 10 July 1915, James wrote a long letter to Wells expressing in detail his view of the matter. After commenting on Wells's failure to perceive the truth of James's view of things, the letter continued, "Of course for myself I live, live intensely and am fed by life, and my value, whatever it be, is in my own kind of expression of that." The fact that

James's novels provided an experience utterly strange to Wells seemed, to the former, all the more reason why Wells should read them. James emphasized that it was when "history and curiosity have been determined in the way most different from my own that I want to get at them—precisely *for* the extension of life, which is the novel's best gift." The attitude toward the novel James manifests here was one he held throughout his maturity.

Almost a quarter of a century earlier he had written an appreciative introduction to Kipling's *Soldiers Three*, a work that embodied experience certainly foreign to Henry James. Still, he took the opportunity to encourage critics to welcome such departures from familiar literary fare. James identified himself with a critic, "who has, *a priori*, no rule for a literary production but that it shall have genuine life." Such a critic, he added, likes a writer "exactly in proportion as he is a challenge, an appeal to interpretation," to the extent, in short, that he makes demands upon the critic's thought and feeling.

James's view of the intimate relationship that should exist between the artist and his product made it imperative that the artist be free to select his own material. The choice of subject should not be open to criticism, since it was more or less thrust upon him by life. His freedom was in reality a freedom from external pressures, any "thou-shalt-nots" applied by society. It is with the artist's *use* of the subject (as subject-matter) that the reader and critic are concerned and on this ground the artist might be held entirely responsible. "His treatment of it . . . is what he actively gives; and it is with what he gives that we are critically concerned." James did feel that the artist was obliged to seek out what had interested him most in his subject and present it in such a way that it would interest the reader. The ways of being interesting were, of course, "as various as the tem-

perament of man, and they are successful in proportion as they reveal a particular mind, different from others."

There are just as many kinds of fiction as there are writers, James held, since each writer had to deal with his own experience as he saw best. Each writer was obliged only to have a thorough perception of his subject, see the way that presented most of it and be consistent in expressing it that way. While this view of the matter might seem all-embracing, it is actually very strict. It condemns the great body of writers who establish no felt relation with their subject but pour bucketfuls of formula onto the mass market; it excludes writers who pad and disguise their subject with irrelevant details, description, characters, scenes, and so forth; it eliminates writers who warp their subject matter to fit happy or unhappy endings, to shock or edify their readers, or simply to exploit their own personality.

If a writer did cultivate his personal sense of things, did express what he most deeply thought and felt about his subject, the result was a highly personal style. This, as often as not, brought him into critical disrepute, as James well knew. In the course of his writing career his style had undergone considerable change, but it was always distinctive, even at the beginning. He continuously experimented with stylistic devices that he thought might aid his expression. He dealt with unusual and difficult material. In each case he tried to express his personal sense of the matter and throughout his career, he had to cope with the criticism of friend and foe because of the very qualities that were most his own.

To his brother William's repeated exhortation that he write a novel in a clear, direct style, avoiding his customary manner, James replied with weary resignation that his brother seemed condemned to look at his work from "a point of view remotely alien to mine in writing it, and to the conditions out of which, as mine, it has inevitably sprung. . . ." What was

needed was for William to make the effort to see the material from his brother's point of view, to set aside presuppositions about subject and form, about the novel itself, and simply give himself over as fully as possible to the process of feeling and understanding what his brother's work had to offer. James realized that it was difficult for a reader to acquire his viewpoint and that he was often alone in what he considered to be the interest of a subject. Nevertheless he remained firm in his conviction that an artist must proceed according to what interests him most in his subject. Artists had to be taken "absolutely and utterly" on their own conditions, not on what they might give.

The novelist Paul Bourget, a friend of James, had suffered at the hands of critics because of his unusual style, and in the course of a letter discussing Bourget's work, James remarked that each worthwhile artist must be aware that certain aspects of his work appeared to be deformities. This was inevitable when one tried to give one's personal sense of things. He wrote (19 August 1898), "Each of us, from the moment we are worth our salt, writes as he can and only as he can, and his writing at all is conditioned upon the very things that from the standpoint of another method most lend themselves to criticism. And we each know much better than anyone else can what the defect of our inevitable form may appear . . . probably, I really understand better than anyone except yourself why, to do the thing at all, you must use your own, and nobody's else, trick of presentation. No two men in the world have the same idea, image and measure of presentation." This was a dedicated artist writing, and the phrase "as he can" did not refer to any easy, spontaneous overflowing, but to the result of an honest and exhaustive consideration of the subject and to expression guided by the utmost craftsmanship. With this view in mind, such terms as "the well-made novel," and "the art of the novel" must be used with



caution. They tend to suggest that there is one kind of novel that is well-made, or certain techniques essentially connected with the novel as an art-form. This is a false emphasis. James contended that a novelist was successful when he grasped the fullest significance of his subject and when he was able to express successfully what had chiefly interested him in it. What was vital was the novelist's personal sense of the matter; questions of technique were secondary, and the accolade "well-made" an *ex post facto* consideration.

There is a passage in *A Small Boy and Others* that deals with James's glimpses of what he called "the old order" of French drama. This was an order which depended upon the resources of the actor and actress almost exclusively and in which the material resources of the drama—settings, costumes and the rest—were counted almost as non-essentials. The play, itself, was secondary to one thing. "That one thing was the quality, to say nothing of the quantity, of the actor's personal resource, technical history, tested temper, proved experience; on which almost everything had to depend. . . ." In surveying the evolution of the theatre since the day of "the old order," it seemed to James that the situation had become reversed. There, as elsewhere in the arts, the personal equation had been reduced to a contribution of "the loosest and sparest," while mechanical conditions, things not really of the essence, had taken over the burden. James had experimented elaborately in trying to find ways and means of more fully expressing what he wanted to say in his art. There are periods in his work when the technique heavily overburdens the substance. But in his major phase the enormous apparatus subserves beautifully the act of personal expression. It is one of the minor tragedies of literary history that critics in the generations succeeding James have been so quick to snap up his technical apparatus and so slow to do that without which a knowledge of the apparatus is beside the point,

namely, to do their best to feel and understand and deeply experience a work of art, to appreciate what the unique quality is of each artist's window upon the world, before proceeding to their critical evaluations.

The personal equation that had characterized the drama of the French theatre in the day of "the old order," and which so appealed to James, was an exhibition of the same personal quality he sought for the novel. Here, too, he found most desirable the individual performance, the unique elements of each artist's expression, the absence of extrinsic machinery. For this reason he especially objected to illustrations and scorned the new fashion of relying upon statistics, photographs, "science," the tendency towards a stereotyped and journalistic prose, the selection of subject-matter not from personal experience but from an array calculated to tempt the public appetite, and all other forces that were de-personalizing the art of fiction and making it a mass product for mass consumption.

Few writers, it is true, had James's dedication to art. The common situation was for a writer, once he had a popular success, to repeat, or attempt to repeat the successful effort. His prose style became a kind of formula that he could repeat mechanically. Instead of being concerned to express what he found most interesting in his subject, a complex of exterior considerations dictated his prose style. James observed that far from being the rule, a cultivated, personal style was the exception and even an exception for which an apology seemed to be thought necessary. The prevalent state of the novel in the late nineteenth century suggested to James the image of each writer as a mill, grinding "with regularity and with a certain commercial fineness" an article for which there was at least a comfortable demand. There was little that savored of personal experience in this process, except as certain mills were associated with certain specialities providing a "useful, well-

tested prescription."

A personal style is a rare thing, James recognized, and as a result many people could not be expected to understand it. They would object to style as something affected and confusing. Yet he felt the artist should strive to develop his own treatment of material, his own "rendering of the text," and trust that some kind of public would eventually come to appreciate it. The usual charge is that such a style is "affected," and in one sense of the term, James wholeheartedly agreed, but not in the sense that implies falsity and insincerity. On the contrary, the artist's expression is all the more genuine for his effort to manipulate the prose medium in such a way as to capture the subtleties and complexities that characterize his view of the subject. His search for the right phrase, the proper tone and emphasis is guided by his positive care for the interest of his subject and its organic development, not by any desire to

attract attention through an artful juggling of words and phrases.

James's final word on the matter may be taken as that he put on the lips of Gabriel Nash, in *The Tragic Muse*, when Nick Dormer asked him if his writing was not "a trifle affected." Nash replied, "That's always the charge against a personal manner: if you've any at all people think you've too much. Perhaps, perhaps—who can say? The lurking unexpressed is infinite, and affectation must have begun, long ago, with the first act of reflective expression—the substitution of the few placed articulate words for the cry or the thump or the hug. Of course one isn't perfect; but that's the delightful thing about art, that there's always more to learn and more to do; it grows bigger the more one uses it and meets more questions the more they come up. No doubt I'm rough still, but I'm in the right direction: I make it my business to testify to the fine."

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### "The Delightful Thing About Art"

No man of letters, I suppose, ever had a more disarming smile than [James's]. . . . It was worth losing a train (and sometimes you had to do that) while he rummaged for the right word. During the search the smile was playing about his face, a smile with which he was on such good terms that it was a part of him chuckling at the other parts of him. I remember once meeting him in the street and asking him how he liked a lecture we had both lately attended. I did not specially want to know nor he to tell, and as he sought for the right words it began to rain, and by and by it was raining heavily. In this predicament he signed to a passing growler and we got in and it remained there stationary until he reached the triumphant conclusion, which was that no one could have delivered a lecture with less offence. They certainly were absolutely the right words, but the smile's enjoyment while he searched for them was what I was watching. It brought one down like Leatherstocking's Killdeer.

J. M. BARRIE

# What Did Maisie Know?

HARRIS W. WILSON

THOSE NOVELS of Henry James written immediately after the play-writing hiatus and concerned exclusively with the English social scene are the most elusive productions of a writer who can sometimes be very elusive indeed. *The Spoils of Poynton*, *What Maisie Knew*, and *The Awkward Age* defy assured and certain interpretation. As is so often the case with James, the problem is not one of opaqueness. Rather, there is too much to be discerned: overtones, symbols, disturbing implications confront the reader on almost every page. Critics attempting to evaluate the whole of James's vast achievement invariably falter here. The most distinguished of them, F. W. Dupee, admits: "of all his various 'periods,' that of the years 1896-1900 is the least readily summarized and appraised."

*What Maisie Knew* presents a particularly difficult problem of interpretation. Encouraged by James in his prefaces and notebooks, critics (e.g., Beach) have invariably approached the novel in terms of its technique, with a consequence that the novel is praised as a *tour de force*, with no regard for its subtle and sinister implications, "the thing hideously behind," which seem to me certainly there. The standard interpretation is that of Michael Swan: "Maisie is a child condemned to divide her life between her divorced parents, both of whom are irresponsible and immoral; she resists the possibility of being corrupted by her parents' example because she has an innate moral sense which develops during the course of the book." Even Edmund Wilson, who saw so much in *The Turn of the Screw*, accepts essentially the same meaning: "Maisie's innocence is not destroyed, although she is played upon by forces of corruption which somewhat harm her or dislocate her emotions by creating ab-

normal relationships." But of the period of *What Maisie Knew*, Wilson observes "the favorite theme is the violation of innocence, with the victim in every case . . . a young or little girl. . . . There is something rather peculiar in his [James's] interest in and handling of this subject. The real effect of all these stories derives, not from the conventional pathos of a victim with whom we sympathize, but from the excitement of violation."

Too little has been said, it seems to me, of the frequency of the "violation" theme in James, especially the violation of child or adolescent innocence. The more obvious examples occur in the tales, *The Author of Beltraffio*, *The Pupil*, *The Turn of the Screw*, in *The Awkward Age*, and supremely in *What Maisie Knew*. James himself, it is true, says nothing in either the notebooks or prefaces concerning this theme, and his silence is probably the main reason that critical estimates of *What Maisie Knew* have gone, in my judgment, so wide of the mark. But the notebooks are a craftsman's blueprints and the prefaces are, in the main, notations of inspiration and discussions of structural problems. James was not one to be explicit concerning the more subtle nuances in his work; the discernment of the "figure in the carpet" he considered the reader's responsibility.

The theme of *What Maisie Knew* is, I submit, the violation of innocence; in particular, the corruption of a child, to add the final turn of the screw, by her own parents. A relatively detailed analysis of the novel is necessary to discern this basic theme, but, in James's own words (in the preface to *The Wings of The Dove*), "Attention of perusal . . . is what I absolutely invoke and take for granted." Too many of James's critics have disregarded this invocation and in

losing what seems at first glance a small detail in this least accidental and gratuitous of all English novelists have lost practically all.

At the beginning of *What Maisie Knew*, Beale and Ida Farange, representative of all that is irresponsible and unprincipled in London Society, are divorced. Maisie, their only child, is to be shared jointly by them, with each parent to have charge of her for six-month periods in rotation. At first Maisie is given lavish attention by her parents as they come in alternate possession of her, each attempting to poison her mind against the other. Soon, however, they tire of both their sport and their daughter, and Maisie's care devolves more and more upon her governesses.

The first of these of any consequence to Maisie is the young and beautiful Miss Overmore, originally in her mother's employ. But so strong is their mutual attraction that when Maisie must return to her father, Miss Overmore defies Mrs. Farange and goes to Maisie and Mr. Farange, to whom through encounters in the park in company with Maisie she is no stranger. But in spite of the affection Maisie develops for Miss Overmore, she finds, when she returns to her mother, in her new governess, Mrs. Wix, an even better friend. Mrs. Wix's dowdiness suffers in contrast with Miss Overmore's beauty, but she more than compensates for her physical deficiencies with a motherly affection that had previously been unknown to Maisie.

Upon Maisie's return to her father's house she finds Miss Overmore's status greatly enhanced there, indeed almost to that of a proprietress. In the face of Miss Overmore's enlarged responsibilities, Maisie's lessons are neglected, and she is given a new freedom which apparently is to be of considerable duration, since news has come that Mrs. Farange has gone abroad for an indeterminate stay. But finally Mrs. Wix appears with the information that Maisie's mother is

engaged to marry a Sir Claude, tidings that Miss Overmore meets with the revelation that she has married Maisie's father. Mrs. Wix is routed, but eventually Sir Claude as Maisie's stepfather appears and, at his instigation, Maisie makes her long overdue transition to her mother's house. There she is enveloped by Mrs. Wix and finds in Sir Claude all she has desired in her own father.

But it is soon evident that things are not well with her mother's new marriage. Maisie actually meets a Jewish financier from the City, Mr. Perriam, in her nursery, and she hears from Mrs. Wix that there is a Lord Eric who is also given the freedom of the upper rooms. But there is no alienation between Maisie and Sir Claude, and he eventually takes her back to her father's house and to the arms of her original governess, whom she now knows as Mrs. Beale.

But Maisie finds that her father's second marriage is no more successful than her mother's. He never makes an appearance at home, and furthermore there is evidence of a definite affection between her stepfather and stepmother. Maisie resumes her old freedom, interspersed by frequent visits from Sir Claude. But these are terminated after the two of them meet in Kensington Gardens Maisie's mother with another man, this time a captain. Impressed by this encounter with the position in which he places the child, Sir Claude withdraws for a period, and it is in this interval that Maisie meets for the last time her father, who by now keeps company with a very rich but very ugly "American" countess, and who makes it clear that he is washing his hands of his daughter. Soon afterward Sir Claude, through the influence of Mrs. Wix, takes Maisie in the absence of Mrs. Beale to Folkestone, preparatory to crossing the channel to Bologne. There she meets also for the last time her mother, who in turn renounces all claim to her. Maisie and Sir Claude go then to Bologne where eventually arrive in order Mrs. Wix and

Mrs. Beale. Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale are morally if not legally freed by the desertion of their mates; shall they assume together their inherited parental duties toward Maisie? Mrs. Wix objects strenuously to the impropriety of such an arrangement and demands that either Sir Claude abandon Mrs. Beale for her and Maisie, or leave Maisie to the maternal care of Mrs. Wix alone. But Mrs. Beale, who has a superior right, would use Maisie to ensnare further Sir Claude and is just as adamant as Mrs. Wix in demanding Maisie for herself. The issue is at last put squarely to Maisie, and that enigmatic child's decision forms the climax of the book.

Mrs. Wix, on her part, tries to instill in Maisie what she calls a "moral sense." She attempts to make clear to her the sinfulness of Sir Claude's and Mrs. Beale's relationship and how no decent girl could live with them. But Mrs. Wix does not, in this case, take into sufficient account the girl's background. Conventional moral suasions mean nothing to Maisie. In shuttling back and forth between her mother's and father's homes, in observing with an ever growing understanding the sordid relationships between her elders, in fine, in the full enormity of her upbringing, Maisie has become, at thirteen years of age, if not amoral, at least capable of a cold-blooded appraisal of the situation that is far beyond Mrs. Wix's conventional powers. Maisie wants to stay with Sir Claude, and the fact that his relation with Mrs. Beale will have no legal sanction means nothing to her. But Mrs. Wix does succeed in her expostulations in giving Maisie a completely new view of the relationship between Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale.

This view is further illuminated by Mrs. Beale's strategy when she arrives. Thinking Maisie completely in the power of Mrs. Wix, Mrs. Beale concentrates on gaining the confidence and liking of the governess. Mrs. Wix appears to be swayed, but when she asks Maisie if she

will still accept both Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale, she is answered in this fashion:

"Not the two now?" Mrs. Wix had caught on; she finished it. "Only him alone?"

"Him alone or nobody."

"Not even *me*?" cried Mrs. Wix.

Maisie looked at her a moment, then began to undress. "Oh you're nobody."

Finally Sir Claude himself, taking her away from the hotel for breakfast, attempts to persuade Maisie to give up Mrs. Wix in order to go with him and Mrs. Beale. But he too fails to take into account what Maisie knows. She knows now that she wants him for herself; she knows, from Mrs. Wix, from her own observation of his close scrutiny of the flamboyant hotel guest in Folkestone and a bare-legged fish-wife in Bologne, his weakness. Earlier in the novel, James, throwing aside his editorial reserve, exclaims, "Oh decidedly I shall never get you to believe the number of things she saw and the number of secrets she discovered." What Maisie saw was Sir Claude's sexual promiscuity, "his weakness," and the secret she discovered in Bologne was that to win him for herself and Mrs. Wix, she must do battle with her stepmother in terms of that weakness. Her greatest asset opposed to Mrs. Beale's lush worldliness is her virginity, and that she is prepared to offer. There is no other explanation for the highly emotional content of the episodes that occur when she and Sir Claude return, after their breakfast, to Mrs. Wix and Mrs. Beale. At the railway station Maisie urges him to take her on the train to Paris; at the quay she shows herself ready to be taken on the boat to England, and finally, in a last desperate appeal just before they reach Mrs. Beale's door, she promises to sacrifice even Mrs. Wix if he will sacrifice Mrs. Beale: "I won't even bid her goodbye. . . I'll stay out till the boat has gone. . . I'll sit on that old bench where you see



the gold Virgin."<sup>1</sup> But Sir Claude is either ignorant or afraid. In any case, he is incapable of Maisie's dreadful logic.

Maisie and Sir Claude arrive at the hotel to find Mrs. Wix packed and preparing to leave for England, feeling that Maisie has departed with Sir Claude and has completely relinquished her "moral sense." But Mrs. Wix returns on the scene exclaiming, "I don't leave the child—I don't, I don't!" There then ensues a verbal tug-of-war between the two older women, in which to Mrs. Beale's appeals Maisie persistently answers, "Will you give him up?" finally goading her stepmother into the cry, "To you, you abominable little horror?" But eventually through Sir Claude's intercession Maisie departs for England and a presumably more conventional life with Mrs. Wix.

The theme, consequently, of *What Maisie Knew* is the corruption of a sensitive child, in this case by a frivolous and vicious segment of London Society as embodied in her parents and step-

parents. But even though Maisie is the inevitable product of her sordid, irresponsible upbringing, there is a perverse innocence and directness in her degeneration that contrasts sharply with and throws cruel light upon her elders' complete infamy.

James, with typical ambiguity, does, it is true, leave another interpretation open—that Maisie was attempting to draw Sir Claude away from Mrs. Beale with no thought of offering herself literally in her stepmother's place. Beach, for instance, sees the whole point of the novel as being the fact that Maisie knows nothing at all. From that view, *What Maisie Knew* must certainly be considered only a "technical exercise." Maisie's mind becomes a kind of passive instrument for the recording of the pointless activities of an unsavory group in the London upper class. We are left with a work of some slight value as social criticism, but little else. I for one would hesitate to assign such small significance to any of James's major works.

And such an interpretation would not, furthermore, allow us, with Mrs. Wix as she carries her charge back to England, still room for wonder at what Maisie knew.

<sup>1</sup>I resist a Freudian interpretation of the scenes at the railroad station and the quay. But the culminating symbol of the Virgin seems too obvious to ignore.

## The Beast in the Jungle

That enchanting Olga [de Meyer] learnt more at Dieppe than my Maisie knew.

HENRY JAMES, quoted by J. E. BLANCHE

... Then we wandered out into [George Sand's] garden, and looking up at the plain old house tried to guess behind which windows the various famous visitors had slept. James stood there a long time, gazing and brooding beneath the row of closed shutters. "And in which of those rooms, I wonder, did George herself sleep?" I heard him suddenly mutter. "Though in which, indeed"—with a twinkle—"in which indeed, my dear, did she *not*?"

EDITH WHARTON

# How to Know Maisie

ADELE BREBNER

TEACHERS do not need to be told that teaching Henry James to undergraduates is a ticklish (should I say "challenging"?) job. A decade or so ago one could count on reasonable success with *The Portrait of a Lady*; those female students who fell in love with Ralph Touchett were sure to defend this narrative, long but direct. But its popularity has declined with the rise of the hero as hunter or fisherman. It was therefore with a feeling of real daring that I decided on James, and the much more difficult James of *What Maisie Knew* as a freshman assignment.

It worked. So well, indeed, that it seems worth while to describe how it happened. At a time when the well-thumbed stories having to do with children emphasize either pathos (*The Catcher in the Rye*), or villainy (*The Bad Seed*), the effect of a more hopeful but still unsentimental account can be tonic. When in addition the manner of its telling proves exciting, the teacher has (what for me is a rare enough experience) a sense of deep satisfaction.

I had first to awaken interest in a story with a somewhat slow start. With older students already skilled in observing craftsmanship I could have relied on James's own preface. He tells in detail the germ of the story and the process by which it was made to evolve from a pathetic incident to the chronicle of "a small expanding consciousness." Maisie moves beyond the stage where "disconcerting the selfishness" of her divorced and warring parents was her only outlet. (The actual event was his stimulus.) He invents for her the small positive role of helping in the formation of a new tie, the marriage of her stepfather to her stepmother. My students, however, were freshmen. I had chosen the story to help

them learn how to read, not to discuss the techniques of writing. I made no use of the preface. Instead I caught their interest by telling them that this was the story of an intelligent child involved in the problem of complicated parental relationships. The question they were to ask themselves was "What *does* Maisie know?" It seemed a legitimate teaching device to leave them to find out later that James's most cherished aim and brilliant accomplishment was to make that question unanswerable.

When the class next met I found the students in various stages of bewilderment. All of them had been absorbed in reading the story; most of them had liked it. The themes and variations worked out on the fairly familiar parental quadrangle had not proved too complicated for them. On the other hand the subtle characterization of Mrs. Wix, the governess, so attractive a part of the story for the adult reader, had failed to register. They were emphatic, and right, in pointing out that Maisie is almost incredibly precocious, but they were content to accept my explanation that after the first page, James deliberately blurs the question of the passage of time. None of them could say what Maisie knew.

I told them, to their relief, that this did not matter, and then went on to make sure that they had a reasonably accurate grasp of the actual matter of the story.

Once the hurdle of getting these facts straight was taken, I returned to the same old question of "what Maisie knew." This time, however, not as one which could be finally answered, but as one to which various bits of evidence could be related. The liveliness of the discussion that followed showed how far most of the students had been able to read between the lines and to pick up some of the more

elusive shades of meaning.

I asked them to begin by naming an episode which they had found genuinely moving. The first choice was not surprising; it was the scene where Maisie's little armor of composure first collapses. She is walking in the park with her stepfather when they encounter her mother in the company of one of her "gentleman friends." While the parents dispute with each other, this gentleman, "the Captain," takes over Maisie. He is quite insistent in saying that her mother is a splendid woman and does indeed love her. (We are left with the impression that the extraordinary impact on Maisie of this remark is the first step in the Captain's discovery of the real nature of the lady. For Maisie breaks into tears.)

As we talked, one student pointed out how much poignancy is added to the scene when one reads later of Maisie's discovery that the Captain is a "cad." There was a burst of protest from the others. It was Maisie's mother, they pointed out, who later applied that term. What Maisie then saw was that if her mother had lost not only the Captain but the ability to recognize the quality of the Captain's feeling for her, then she was indeed pitiable.

Perhaps the indignant students who made this correction were revealing a capacity to read attentively rather than between the lines. For James is here explicit: "She was fairly hushed with the sense that he spoke of her mother as she had never heard anyone speak. It came over her as she sat silent that, after all, this admiration and this respect were quite new words, which took a distinction from the fact that nothing in the least resembling them in quality had on any occasion dropped from the lips of her father, of Mrs. Beale, of Sir Claude or even of Mrs. Wix." They had recognized this as a step in Maisie's "expanding consciousness," from hatred of her mother to a kind of understanding. They naturally chose it as a moving incident.

Natural enough too was the second

choice of scene, for in it Maisie comes as close as she ever does to discovering what her father is like. Here, however, what impressed them most was the way in which Maisie's cultural naïveté reveals itself along with her human insight.

She has been taken by her father to the home of the "vulgar" American heiress whom he hopes to marry. We look at the drawing-room through her eyes and our own simultaneously: "In the middle of the small bright room and the presence of more curtains and cushions, more pictures and mirrors, more palm-trees drooping over brocaded and gilded nooks, more little silver boxes scattered over little crooked tables and little miniatures hooked upon velvet screens than Mrs. Beale and her ladyship could, in an unnatural alliance, have dreamed of mustering. . . ." Here Maisie begins to glimpse how natural it is that her father should choose to move on from both his former wives to the possessor of such wonders.

The students found that these two scenes with Maisie and her parents were the high points of the story. They also recalled a number of other incidents and conversations illustrating the steps by which Maisie advances towards knowledge. A few examples will illustrate the kinds of things they noticed.

They saw that Maisie, early in the story, discovers the usefulness of seeming to be stupid. As soon as she recognizes the real motive of each parent's inquiries concerning the other, she learns how *not* to know. They felt too that there was a kind of growing maturity in the way in which she reacts to the discovery that charm and irresponsibility often go together, as they do in Sir Claude. She is sorry, but not dismayed. And they spoke of the number of incidental pleasures she is able to relish—in particular the prospect of showing off her knowledge of Boulogne.

This sort of information about Maisie, in fact, both pleased and puzzled them. They knew that she has been neglected,

indeed abused, and is wise beyond her years. Yet she becomes neither a "case" nor an obnoxious little martyr. They recognized the fun in the story (James's own word for it is "comicality") and wondered why it had not seemed offensive. I attempted no explanation; it was enough that they had enjoyed it.

The great step, however, by which Maisie leaves her childhood behind her, was one which required for its appreciation some leading questions on my part. It occurs when she voluntarily relinquishes Sir Claude, whom she loves and whom she might have made miserable. She has discovered that he will be as happy as he is capable of being with Mrs. Beale. She is untouched by Mrs. Wix's agitation over the "immorality" of their behavior. Her own kind of moral judgment, James makes clear, is superior. She has come to know Sir Claude for what he is, and is not impelled to try to change him. She does not feel betrayed, but she resigns herself to going off with Mrs. Wix on the Channel boat. The story ends with the two of them talking together:

"I didn't look back, did you?"

"Yes, he wasn't there," said Maisie.

"Not on the balcony?"

Maisie waited a moment; then "He wasn't there," she simply said again.

Mrs. Wix also was silent a while. "He went to *her*," she finally observed.

"Oh, I know!" the child replied.

Mrs. Wix gave a sidelong look. She still had room for wonder at what Maisie knew.

What my class by this time knew can be fairly certainly stated. They knew that the story of a sensitive child, if well enough told, can have both pathos and humor. They saw a little of the connection between the successful telling and the magnificent use of a "point of view." And they were convinced that in one case at least a difficult process of arriving at maturity had resulted not in "the death of the heart," but in a rather enviable capacity for making the best of life. Learning to know Maisie and discovering Henry James at the same time had been a good experience. I shall assign the story again without misgivings.

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## The Children's Hour

[James] was . . . a very stately and courteous old gentleman; and, in some social aspects especially, rather uniquely gracious. He proved in one point that there was a truth in his cult of tact. He was serious with children. I saw a little boy gravely present him with a crushed and dirty dandelion. He bowed; but he did not smile. That restraint was a better proof of the understanding of children than the writing of *What Maisie Knew*.

G. K. CHESTERTON

# The Turn of the Screw as Retaliation

LEO B. LEVY

THOUGH few Jamesian texts have been the subject of a more intense critical examination than *The Turn of the Screw*, the significance of its closeness to the debacle of *Guy Domville*, which brought five years of playwriting to an inglorious end, appears not to have been well understood. The editor of James's plays, Mr. Leon Edel, has been alone in perceiving that the sequence of these two works conceals an important psychological transition. For Edel, the world of *The Turn of the Screw* is one "of childish fear and terror," of regressive flight into infantile fantasy, provoked by the collapse of James's theatrical visions. "The jeering audience in St. James's had reduced him to the helplessness of an unappreciated child; it had cut at the heart of his creativity," Mr. Edel believes; the nightmarish horrors of *The Turn of the Screw* he interprets as *prima facie* evidence of the disturbing and disordering frustrations in which James's dramatic years terminated.<sup>1</sup>

By reversing the direction of Mr. Edel's hypothesis, we may see more clearly into the relations between *Guy Domville* and *The Turn of the Screw*, and we may also account for some of the controversial qualities of the tale. We may read *The Turn of the Screw* not as a testament of inner defeat but as a celebration of a self once more in possession of its powers. James's reaction to the failure of *Guy Domville* appears to have been a healthy one: he was angry and bitter, exasperated and enraged—but scarcely childish. Five days after his play opened, James heard from the Archbishop of Canterbury the story that was to become *The Turn of the*

*Screw*, and a few days later sketched it in his notebooks. James may well have been struck by the opportunity it presented to take a peculiarly civilized revenge upon the audience which was still responding apathetically to *Guy Domville*.<sup>2</sup> Read in this context, *The Turn of the Screw* embraces an act of retaliation upon the "vulgar" spectator of *Guy Domville*. Such an interest does not, of course, exhaust its multiplicity of motives, but it does explain the juxtaposition of two indisputable facts—that James had experienced intense disappointment at the reception of *Guy Domville*, and that readers, vulgar and otherwise, of *The Turn of the Screw* have been experiencing frustration in their turn ever since. James felt that in his plays he had made the most strenuous concessions to an audience which demanded maximum simplification and transparency of meaning. In *The Turn of the Screw* the situation is reversed: James is in supreme control of a range of ambiguities which he evidently quite intentionally refuses to limit. He is no longer subject to what he had regarded as the arbitrary and unpredictable whims of an ignorant audience, but is free himself to invoke the arbitrary and the unpredictable.

Retaliation in *The Turn of the Screw* takes two forms, the first that of a primitive and symbolic expulsion of the audience which did not respond to the plays. The story opens with the departure of the ladies whose curiosity about the tale promised by the host cannot sustain a

<sup>1</sup> *The Complete Plays of Henry James* (1949), p. 61. Mr. Edel expresses his views on *The Turn of the Screw* more fully in his introduction to *The Ghostly Tales of Henry James* (1948).

<sup>2</sup> *Guy Domville* opened on 5 January 1895, and ran for four weeks in London. Though James did not complete *The Turn of the Screw* until 1 December 1897, the finished tale embodies the details of the brief note he made on 12 January 1895.



short wait for the arrival of the governess's manuscript. Their interest is crude to begin with. "Oh, how delicious!" one of them replies to the solemn intimation of events genuinely sinister. Another lady exclaims, "Oh, I can't wait for the story!" to learn whom it was that the heroine "loved." When the host admonishes that "the story *won't* tell . . . not in any literal, vulgar way," she protests, "That's the only way I ever understand." James's pleasure in excluding the unfit from his audience is evident: "The departing ladies who had said they would stay didn't, of course, thank heaven, stay: they departed in consequence of arrangements made, in a rage of curiosity, as they professed, produced by the touches with which he had already worked us up."

But even the "compact and select" auditory James thought worthy of his tale have found it as much of an exercise in the baffling as in the thrilling—a fact which reflects the extension and refinement of a motive which expelled the vulgar only to leave the rest puzzled. We can match James's assurances that he intended his tale to "mean" nothing—they are several—with those of his remarks which suggest that he had a more serious intention. The foundering rock remains: there is no way of positively determining the point of view from which we are to read. The problem is familiar: is the governess's record the one to which we are to subscribe at face value, or are we to understand that hers is a distorting, neurotic consciousness, shaping the world into an evil conformity? Readers of *The Turn of the Screw* seem immemorially committed to debating this question—a situation which surely would have delighted James, and one consistent with the claims of the interpretation advanced here.

It has been proposed often enough that James wishes to beguile his reader with a problem in "point of view" that is unresolvable. In such a light, James's tale is a piece of technical virtuosity in which he explores the farthest reaches of equiv-

ocal statement, a Coleridgean venture into poetic vagueness. But if this *was* James's intention, *The Turn of the Screw* has behind it a motive less innocent than his disclaimers that it was a *jeu d'esprit*, an *amusette*, a thing of "gleams and glooms," would imply. In the largest sense, its motive was to escape the enforced trivialities, the bald stereotypes, and plain statements in which the plays had involved him; more positively, the desire to create a world of values antithetical to that of the plays afforded James an opportunity of satisfying his anger with the audience which had found even the obvious too difficult. The impulse to defeat the reader with the unfathomable was a relatively mature one: James was expressing through it a complex reaction to the banalities which he had deludedly persuaded himself would make him a successful dramatist. To go as far as he did in *The Turn of the Screw* was to land himself in the thickest part of those Jamesian woods from which he had strayed.

Some of the tensions which had made it impossible for James to put more of himself into his plays work themselves out in the language of *The Turn of the Screw*. James's insufficient identification with the theatre was based upon the moral reservations which appear in *The Tragic Muse* (1890), the novel which is so full of his love for the dramatic art and yet so curiously marred by his conviction that the theatre was not "respectable." Peter Sherringham, an enlightened patron of the drama, engages in a long, ignominious debate with Miriam Rooth, the glamorous and inspired actress he wishes to marry; Sherringham becomes a figure of craven prudishness who exhibits an absolute contempt of her art. He will marry Miriam only if she abandons the theatrical career he had himself encouraged. Though he respects and admires the actress Mlle. Voisin, he informs Miriam that he will not pay her a social visit, because in France players are not

accepted in society. "At least it isn't the right sort of thing abroad, and even in England my foreign ideas stick to me," he says in Chapter 42.

These attitudes enter into *The Turn of the Screw*, where the note of the disreputable and the lurid, the deceptive and the false, is sustained by images of the theatre. But they appear in a less ambivalent form, newly assimilated to the metaphorical design of James's language, in which they convey very exactly a moral feeling which associates the shady and the theatrical with the positively evil. Much is made, for example, of the histrionic talents of the children. They stage a continuous drama of deception for their governess, who is at first entertained: "They not only popped out at me as tigers, and as Romans, but as Shakespeareans, astronomers, and navigators." The children are prepared at every turn with graceful and amusing recitation and pantomime of lessons, of people, of attitudes and events. It is only by her gradual penetration of these disguises that the governess "came across traces of little understandings between them by which one of them should keep me occupied while the other slipped away." Thus Miles holds her enthralled with his piano-playing while Flora vanishes. Bly itself, "with its grey sky and withered garlands, its bared spaces and

scattered dead leaves, was like a theatre after the performance—all strewn with crumpled play-bills." These are the settings of the unspeakably horrible. The apparition of Peter Quint ("a base menial") gives the governess "a sort of sense of looking like an actor"—though she confesses that she has never seen one. And he is "tall, active, erect—but never—no, never!—a gentleman."

In associating the theatrical with the dreadful insinuations of the ghostly, James was, perhaps spitefully, anathematizing the art he had practiced with such painful consequences. Either he intends the constant derogation of the drama as an expression of the deranged imagination of the governess—in which case he has disentangled himself from it altogether—or he is taking the vicarious satisfaction of justifying his earlier feelings of suspicion and hostility by connecting their object with an evil intended to have external validity. Both strategies imply a progression beyond the extremes of ambivalence displayed in *The Tragic Muse* and in the plays which followed it. As a complex resolution, in literary terms, of the besetting conflicts of the dramatic years, *The Turn of the Screw* is at once a retaliatory gesture toward the immediate past and the achievement of a creative spirit which had rediscovered itself.

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## The Turn of the Screw

As the curtain was falling on the last act Henry James entered the theatre by the stage door. He was informed that all had gone well. No one told him that a rough in the gallery had shouted at the end—when George Alexander had said, "I'm the *last*, my lord, of the Domvilles"—"It's a damned good thing you are!"

LEON EDEL, from *IRENE VANBRUGH*

# The Ambassadors: The Crucifixion of Sensibility

WILLIAM BYSSHE STEIN

A SINGLE poetic image establishes the concord of structure and theme in Henry James's *The Ambassadors*. Centered as skillfully and precisely as the main jewel in a delicate watch, the image controls and defines, organizes and unifies the complex relationships of thought and feeling that comprise the dramatic focus of the novel. As a structural metaphor it delimits the area of impressions which specifically influence Strether's decision "to save" Madame de Vionnet. Significantly it fixes the magnetic pole of this flux of experience in the crucial second chapter of Book Fifth, the scene of Strether's astonishing outburst to little Bilham in Gloriani's garden. This particular incident James himself labels "a crisis" in the mind of his hero. And it is the resolution of this feeling which ultimately impels Strether to support the cause of Madame de Vionnet against the ambassadorial instructions of Mrs. Newsome. The image, the metaphor of "the golden nail," traces the rise, the progress, and the culmination of the attempts of Strether's sensibility to adjust itself to a set of values which conflict with his innate Puritanism. But beyond its structural function, the metaphor also operates as a symbol, illuminating James's deeper thematic designs. So closely related is "the golden nail" to the choric repetition of the phrase "to save" that it suggests a subtle kinship with the idea of crucifixion in the Christian tradition. In the novel, however, the implications are not religious, despite the moral overtones of Strether's thinking. They are, on the contrary, aesthetic. The image of "the golden nail" is constantly associated with cherished forms of beauty. As these impinge upon Strether's consciousness, they

prepare the mode of his disillusionment: the crucifixion of his ideals on the cross of sensibility.

James's deployment of the image is extremely daring. To adapt it to its structural and symbolic purpose, he initiates it "reflexively" at the peak of the emotional climax generated by Strether's confession in Gloriani's garden. Yet the metaphor of "the golden nail" does not complete itself until the last part of the first chapter of Book Seventh! In short, not until the psychological crisis in Strether's mind has run its full course does James permit the influence of the image to be dissipated—but now the catastrophe is inevitable. The controlling image, like the wheel of fortune, has brought the hero's destiny to the point where it stands poised for the final plunge toward disaster. In terms of structure and theme the metaphor of "the golden nail" has been endowed with the power of a new and radical device of prose composition.

In the prefaces to the New York Edition of his works James sporadically discusses a use of imagery that is not geared to the mere exercise of casual ingenuity. And in several instances he elaborates on his method of extending its discipline in his art. In his remarks on *The Tragic Muse* the economy of expression which appeals to him has affinities with a controlling metaphor like "the golden nail": "To put all that is possible of one's idea into a form and compass that will contain and express it only by delicate adjustments and an exquisite chemistry, so that there will at the end be neither a drop of one's liquor left nor a hair's breadth of one's glass to spare. . . . Therein lies the secret of the appeal . . . of the successfully foreshortened thing, where repre-

sentation is arrived at . . . not by the addition of items . . . but by the art of figuring synthetically." Pursuing the same subject in the preface to "The Altar of the Dead," he reduces foreshortening to the function of imagery: "Full-fed statement . . . the imaged resume of as many vivifying elements as may be coherently packed into an image at once . . . is the predominant artifice; thanks to which we catch by the very small reflector, which is absolutely of minimum size for its task, a quite 'unlikely' amount, I surmise, of the movement of life." A further exposition of this principle of imagery occurs in his observations on *Daisy Miller*. This time he attributes to the foreshortening image the complete mastery over the conflict, whereby it becomes "the explosive principle in one's material, thoroughly noted, adroitly allowed to flush and colour and animate the disputed value." In other words, James ascribes to the image in prose writing the value that it has in modern poetry. If organically integrated into the plot of a novel, it becomes the generative center of form and meaning.

The operation of this radical compositional law in *The Ambassadors* cannot be dissociated from the "note absolute" which James claims for the novel. He applies this phrase to the inspiration for the work: a conversation repeated to him which, in sense and circumstances, recapitulates the one imputed to Strether in Gloriani's garden. This incident becomes the "strong stake" around which the narrative swirls, "driven in," as it is, "with hard taps," in the very tideway of the unfolding action. How accurately James's memory recaptures the exact nature of the creative impulse behind the novel is difficult to determine, yet the descriptive imagery in which he couches his observations looks back at his manipulation of "the golden nail." And therefore a definite logic of composition asserts itself when he introduces the root idea of the controlling metaphor in Book Fifth where Strether's dilemma is announced. James

crystalizes the full import of the outburst by relating it directly to his first meeting with Madame de Vionnet. As Strether reflects on the heady quality of the two experiences, he cannot consciously isolate their causal pattern: "[the] impressions were still present; it was as if something had happened that 'nailed them,' made them more intense." Ironically, even as these thoughts stir in his mind, the gracious figure of Madame de Vionnet swims dizzily in his memory. Yet the deepest implications of this sentence lie in the phrase enclosed in quotation marks. Here James, as he often does, deliberately resorts to dramatic foreshadowing. "On the strength of a respectable hint" he predicts the development of a narrative movement hinging on the heraldic phrase.

James next proceeds to deepen this original impression of Madame de Vionnet in Strether's mind. He widens the susceptible area of the hero's sensibility while tightly regulating the primary influence. Thus Strether's visit to Madame de Vionnet's home achieves this end, for here James locates the cultural correlative of the beauty personified in Madame de Vionnet. In this mellow and traditional environment she gratifies some "disinterested aesthetic" sense of her visitor. She becomes the apotheosis of the life he has missed. In the relationship now established he may perhaps collect reparations, though vicariously, on the beautiful but unattainable existence for which his soul yearns. So complete is Strether's surrender to Madame de Vionnet that he confesses himself helpless. She can make of their relation "whatever she might choose to make of it." In deference to this compulsion, Strether, under the subtle intimidation of his hostess, tentatively commits himself: "'I ought to save you?' So it was that the way to meet her—and the way, as well, in a manner, to get off—came over him. He heard himself use the exorbitant word, the very sound of which helped to determine his flight. 'I'll save you if I can.'"

It is James's task at this stage of the novel to maintain Madame de Vionnet in Strether's center of consciousness and gradually to increase her influence on the New Englander. Yet at the same time he cannot destroy Strether's "relations" with other characters. He solves the problem by a consummate feat of virtuosity in an extended scene that takes place in Chad Newsome's apartment. Holding to the tightness of "imaged resume"—in a phrase, reorienting the locus of Madame de Vionnet's "determining impression"—he draws into the orbit of Strether's consciousness the complementary reflection of the Countess—her daughter Jeanne. In Jeanne, as he does in Chad, Strether sees the shaping hand of the mother. Her beauty is innocent and inviolate. Strether reasons that he cannot sacrifice her to the vulgar interests of Woollett. Therefore Chad cannot renounce the family that has obviously instilled in him certain qualities of its "wonderfulness." And thus Strether's impressions are stretched to a tension of ecstasy requiring release or sacrifice in terms as drastic as those to be imposed upon Chad.

In having Strether mentally commit himself to this ideal, so at odds with the social and moral values sanctioned by his native environment, James has adroitly maneuvered him into dramatic focus. The emotional crisis which Strether experienced after his first meeting with Madame de Vionnet has reached an explosive climax: "his judgments, conclusions, discriminations are . . . in solution—in the pot, on the fire, . . . simmering" (*Notebooks*, p. 393). Once these congeries of thought and feeling come to an inevitable boil, a residual impression will remain controlling Strether's attitude until chance rules otherwise. Thereupon James ushers Madame de Vionnet upon the stage, and a synthesis is activated—the figure of "the golden nail" begins to operate.

Under the impact of Jeanne's beauty, Strether refuses to discuss her future with her mother, especially in relation to

Chad. Instead he exhorts the latter not to probe into Jeanne's romantic inclinations. The older woman willingly grants this favor, and, as she turns to leave, gently remarks: "Anything, everything you ask, I sha'n't know then—never. Thank you." Strether is now wholly compromised; her "thank you" lingers in his mind, "as if he had been tripped and had a fall." He cannot honorably accept a favor without granting one in return: "he had, under pressure from a particular perception, inconsistently, quite stupidly, committed himself, and, with her subtlety sensitive on the spot, to an advantage, she had driven in, by a single word, a little golden nail, the sharp intention of which he signally felt . . . he had more closely connected himself." And thus is resolved, with but one exception, the mass of impressions that began to take shape in Gloriani's charming garden. James has condensed them into a single impression, drafted them into dramatic service. He has committed Strether to a course of action that will lead to catastrophe. It may be noted, without going into detail, that the lives of the other characters—those of Bilham, Chad, Miss Barrace, Maria Gostrey, and even Mrs. Newsome—insidiously "press in [on Strether], squeeze forward, to the best of their ability; but restricted as the whole thing is to implications and involutions only, they prevail at best by indirectness."

James needs now only to eliminate from his hero's mind all doubts as to Madame de Vionnet's integrity and honor, in short, to provide him with a means of rationalizing his position. Having decided that Chad cannot give up Jeanne and her mother, he finds that the decision is no solution to the problem. To give things "time to justify themselves or at least to pass," Strether habitually visits the cathedral of Notre Dame, where he discovers "a sense of safety, of simplification." On the occasion of one of these visits Strether is attracted by the figure of a devout worshiper, a woman who sits silently, lost in



contemplation of the altar before her. As he is leaving the chapel, the woman suddenly rises and walks toward the door. He looks at her curiously, and then recognizes her as Madame de Vionnet. This happy meeting, Strether feels, is "a revelation of her heritage," and it excites in him a sense of beautiful things: "She was romantic for him beyond what she could have guessed . . . the moments had already . . . drawn their deepest tinge from the special interest excited in him by his vision of his companion's identity. . . . This attitude fitted admirably into the stand he had privately taken about her connection with Chad. . . . It helped him to stick fast at the point he had reached . . . he would stick fast" (*my italics*). And once again James reaffirms Strether's dangerous susceptibility to beauty: the latter's tendency to seek verification for the aesthetic values exalted by his tender sensibilities, not for the dark truths harbored in the sly evasions of sympathetic friends. He leaves no doubt that Strether has dedicated himself to deliberate self-deception. This perversity represents the strange reparations for early disillusionment.

Later, after the encounter, they sit across from each other at a table drinking wine in delightful intimacy, and, quite logically, Strether traces his decision "to save" her to the conversation about Jeanne in which she had confirmed the exquisite qualities of that first impression in Gloriani's garden: "the sense that the situation was running away with him, had never been so sharp as now; all the more that he could perfectly put his finger on the moment that it had taken the bit in its teeth. *That accident had definitely occurred, the other evening . . . it had occurred, as he fully knew, at the moment when he interposed between this lady and her child, when he suffered himself so to discuss with her a matter closely concerning them that her own subtlety, with its significant 'thank you' instantly sealed the occasion in her favor*" (*my italics*). Thus, in his own words, James acknowledges

the crucial function of "the golden nail," whose penetration was effected by Madame de Vionnet's ingratiating "thank you." At the same time this fictional confession asserts the structural efficacy of the image.

Now James inexorably turns the stream of their conversation in the direction of the state of affairs generated by that meeting. Madame de Vionnet coerces Strether into definitely committing himself on "saving" her. Strether admits that he cannot, "in honor," not see her through and that he will "save" her. This is the complete sacrifice that his sensibilities dictate. And just as on the occasion of their other meeting, James has the Countess recognize Strether's sympathy with her intentions. Therefore she beatifically announces his reward, a gentle "thank you." Not a suggestion of independent initiative stirs in Strether: "The golden nail she had then driven in pierced a good inch deeper. Yet he reflected that he himself had only meanwhile done what he had made up his mind to do on the same occasion. . . . He had simply stood fast on the spot which he had then planted his feet."

To all intents and purposes the final design of *The Ambassadors* is now predictable. The emotional crisis, literally the crisis of the plot, has resolved itself. James's structural metaphor has served its purpose. The slight indecision that marked Strether's determination at the first penetration of "the golden nail" has evolved into an inescapable commitment. He unconditionally accepts his "relation" with Madame de Vionnet. From this point on all the incidents that occur are, in a sense, anticlimactic: they merely hasten his doom, his crucifixion on a cross of sensibility. But perhaps he recognizes that his ideals, however falsely misconstrued by others, are aesthetically and emotionally valid, not unlike Christ's in the moral sphere. Or perhaps the latent scruples of his Puritan conscience ordain his final fate: the punishment for reparations of disillusionment, falsely collected.

# James's Rhetoric of "Quotes"

GEORGE KNOX

OFTEN the composition teacher must defend the artist against the purist student who has absorbed the dicta of the handbook, explaining that exceptions may be exploited for effects which the beginning writer has not earned or properly planned for. Even the quotation mark apparently used for apology may become a versatile instrument in the hands of Henry James as he develops what one might call "a rhetoric of 'quotes.'" Therefore, using *The Ambassadors* (Harper 1948 ed.) for my examples I would like to demonstrate at least five different categories of use: (1) apology by author for the fictional character, or by character himself, for slang and inelegance, (2) substitute for oral inflection, and the submerged subjunctive, (3) specification of previously implicit idea, (4) notation for class identity or cultural "presences," and (5) designed ambiguity for sake of symbolic depth.

In the first case, it is enough to show how James employs the quotation mark to allow his character to excuse an expression, and at the same time to stress it: "I don't care the least little 'hang,'" he smiled, 'for their nationality'" (128). For a journalistic term: "This echo—as distinct, over there, in the dry, thin air, as some shrill 'heading' above a column of print—seemed to reach him even as he wrote" (114). Or, colloquialism: "it was that rare youth he should have enjoyed being 'like'" (152). And, "of their having to recognize the formation, between them, of a 'split'" (252). Then, from the passage which reveals Chad's and Mme. de Vionnet's guilt, "the violence of their having 'cut' him, out there in the eye of nature on the assumption that he wouldn't know it" (383).

However, since there are so many instances of words obviously slangy for

which James does not apologize by using quotes, and so many words not inelegant which are enclosed, we must assume other purposes. One such purpose is to indicate emphasis in interior monologue, primarily in Strether's consciousness, and involving what I might call the submerged subjunctive, where the omniscient observer would or might say something in the place of the character: "Sarah's answer came so straight, so 'pat,' as might have been said, that he felt on the instant its origin" (344). Although the border between James's speaking for the character and the character's speaking for himself in interior monologue is finely drawn, several instances show the difference clearly. Here, Strether speaks to himself: "It was at present queer beyond words, 'subtle,' he would have risked saying, that such suggestions should keep crossing the scene. . ." (397). Strether, meditating on his impressions, thinks that "it was as if something had happened that 'nailed' them, made them more intense. . ." (156). He muses that he "had the advantage that his pronouncing her 'all right' gave him for an inquiry" (400).

Closely related to this is the specification of a mood or the concretization of "idea" only implicit in a preceding conversation or meditation. In such cases James feels the quote must convey a specific flavor, or force us to extract the tonal potential, or show there before us like a sign of some value in a community or milieu. A conversation about the possibilities of Chad's marriage to Mme. de Vionnet culminates in the question: "'And if he both wants to marry her and is on good terms with them, why isn't he 'free'?"' (126). Chad's freedom is ambiguous from several points of view, of course, but the idea of freedom was implicit in preceding assumptions without be-

ing specifically named. Later, the idea of eligibility emerges in another question: "Doesn't regard him, you mean, as such an 'eligible' young man?" (127). Here the quote makes the word itself a question in a term resplendent with social implications.

And because of the need to convey these implications as the awareness of one's awareness, James makes the interior monologue a dramatic instrument. Strether is conscious of himself as reflecting the American attitude, a crass standard often based on assumptions different from the Europeans':

There had been objects she or her predecessors might even conceivably, on occasion, needfully have parted with; but Strether couldn't suspect them of having sold old pieces to get 'better' ones. They would have felt no difference as to better or worse.

The center of consciousness carries on a dramatic dialogue, assigning voices, roles, or as James says, "parts," in a kind of dialectic. These cases not only indicate the awareness of different levels of usage, but the simultaneous realization of opposing points of view and the gradual rising to the surface of meanings previously inarticulate.

Another aspect of this dramatizing attaches to pointing up or naming the reflection of a convention, a class attitude, or a cultural judgment formed at a strategic moment. As Strether's consciousness separates him farther and farther from Woollett he slips more and more into the European consciousness, and this leads to more catholic views. As Strether becomes more subtle, James must achieve greater economy. One day in Notre Dame, Strether discovers a "fellow visitant" who turns out to be Mme. de Vionnet. Since he had come more and more to think out of the Woollett context and in the "recalls of things imagined" (205), he asks himself what this woman had come for if not to pray.

Strether's reading of such matters was, it must be owned, confused; but he wondered if her attitude were some congruous fruit of absolutism, of "indulgence." He knew but dimly what indulgence, in such a place, might mean; yet he had, as with a soft sweep, a vision of how it might indeed add to the zest of active rites. (206)

The word "indulgence" then must carry the sense of one's immersion in the experience of "splendidly-protected meditation," of his own awareness of how possibilities of experience might be spiritual and at the same time physical, and of his being allowed the fullest sense of what was "given" to him.

With these openings into Strether's consciousness, James need not expatiate on the differences between propriety in Woollett and propriety in "Europe." The quote does the job, indicating an attitude which the center of consciousness demands we take in with him. As he becomes aware of "the empire of 'things,'" in "Europe," of those wonderful things and all their radiance of romance and ritual, Strether's meditations are peppered with quotes indicative of multiple mood. For example, the word "in" is usually enclosed to indicate Strether's realization of a social acceptance, of a penetration, an initiation, a cultural and psychological intermingling: being within a withinness (e.g., 82, 290).

Strether speculates about Chad's associations among the rising flood of their compatriots and James sets off "colony" whenever Strether thinks of the group, indicating ambivalent points of view toward the group and its dubious composition. That is, one can look at the group from the Parisian bias, or from the bias of the veteran expatriate, or from the newcomer's. The world of "Europe" compares with the world of Woollett, as a "great" world does to a lesser one. Thus James can dramatize *presences*, as when (speaking of herself, Strether, and the influences of Paris) Maria describes a combined force having created the "wonderful con-

sciousness" of Strether: "'We've done some of it. You and I and 'Europe''" (92). As a character may stand for Paris, Europe, or Woollett, or as Woollett may stand for America, or Paris for Europe, so can an enclosed word stand for some quality in each of these entities.

More specifically, Chad's house synecdochically represents or contains the presence of Europe which suddenly and disconcertingly confronts poor Strether, may even be said to leap out upon him, to follow out the pattern of Jamesian ambush. "High, broad, clear—he was expert enough to make out in a moment that it was admirably built—it fairly embarrassed our friend by the quality that, as he would have said, it 'sprang' on him" (66). And, thinking of Sarah, Strether allows the personality of Woollett to intrude through the word; its being quoted demands our active participation in the consciousness of both Woollett and Strether.

What had told, at any rate, at the window of the train, was her high, clear forehead, that forehead which her friends, for some reason, always thought of as a "brow"; the long reach of her eyes—it came out at this juncture in such a manner as to remind him oddly enough, also of that of Waymarsh's; and the unusual gloss of her dark hair, dressed and hatted after her mother's refined example, with an avoidance of extremes that it was always spoken of at Woollett as "their own." (252)

Such passages are also dramatic, aside from the in-and-out-of-the-picture-frame kind of stage directions implicit in the quote, setting up an agon between "Europe" and Woollett, or "Woollett" and Europe. That is, the quote "essentializes."

The dramatic quality of *The Ambassadors* derives from such smaller drama-within-drama interludes.

It was ridiculous, but Mrs. Pocock and Waymarsh struck him as fairly waiting for his answer. It was indeed as if they were arranged, gathered for a performance, the performance of "Europe" by his confederate

and himself. Well, the performance could only go on. (273)

Going "on" is often set off to point up the multiple mood. It may mean to *continue* in a manner of doing things, to *appear* on the scene in the manner of stage entrance, and at the same to *endure* a situation further. And the playing of "part" means accepting the "given" and receiving the impressions of life as though they were stage directions from the voice of one's destiny. The quote is required, then, to expand the metaphorical context, to indicate a dramatic interaction of images in symbolic action. In one passage James uses the quote as vehicle to play on the idea of laundering. Passing out of a reference to a "stream" of life, he moves into a reference to Strether's state of excitement.

This overflow fairly deepened, wastefully abounded, as he observed the smallness of anything corresponding to it on the part of his friend. That was exactly this friend's happy case; he "put out" his excitement, or whatever other emotion the matter involved, as he put out his washing; than which no arrangement could make more for domestic order. It was quite for Strether himself, in short, to feel a personal analogy with the laundress bringing home the triumphs of the mangle. (364-365)

And, as there are various possible constructions to be placed on putting out, so there are plays on various possibilities of in-taking.

As Strether contemplates Mamie as "bridal" he develops an image of her "receiving" in two definite senses: (1) in her feminine and passive openness to Chad, her position of acceptance and courtship being Woollett's and her own, and (2) her transplanted or foreign presence as hostess, attended with implications of pretentious provincial self-consciousness (305). She appears both active and passive, and in James's world one's opening himself to acceptance of "the

given" is an active "appreciation." In the garden scene where Strether admonishes little Bilham to "Live!" James packs the idiom with these two voices, the active and the passive.

"The affair—I mean the affair of life—couldn't, no doubt, have been different for me; for it's, at the best, a tin mould, either fluted and embossed with ornamental excrescences, or else smooth and dreadfully plain, into which, a helpless jelly, one's consciousness is poured—so that one 'takes' the form, as the great cook says, and is more or less compactly held by it: one lives, in fine, as one can." (150)

The word "takes" must convey the Jamesian themes of acceptance and renunciation, of suffering in the sense of receiving and enduring, of compromise with life; i.e., all the implications of being "in" life.

The favorite quoted words get us into James's symbolism. For example, Strether has gone out into the country to devote a day to "that French ruralism, with its cool special green, into which he had hitherto looked only through the little oblong window of the picture frame." Chapters XXX and XXXI are pervaded with imagery of picture-frame scenes, and he uses such expressions as: "fell into a composition" (375), "a finer harmony in things" (376), "oblong gilt frame" (379), "peopled all his space for him" (379), "It was suddenly as if these figures, or something like them, had been wanted in the picture" (382), and many others, plus the wonderfully arranged and harmoniously colored scenic arrangements. We should begin with the opening lines of Chapter XXX, by which time we should be conditioned to think in terms of scene, dramatic and artistic; of exits and entrances on the stage scene, of movements modally through the picture frame spaces, shades, surfaces, depths, atmospheric densities.

It had been as yet, for the most part, but a land of fancy for him—the background of

fiction, the medium of art, the nursery of letters; practically as distant as Greece, but practically, also, almost as consecrated. Romance could weave itself, for Strether's sense, out of elements mild enough; and even after what he had, as he felt, lately "been through," he could thrill a little at the chance of seeing something somewhere that would remind him of a certain small Lambinet that had charmed him, long years before, at a Boston dealer's, and that he had, quite absurdly, never forgotten. (374)

Taken in its larger context, "been through" means what he has endured, experienced, suffered; and in another dimension it means those transitions between Strether's several worlds of awareness as he moves toward his final enlightenment. He has at last *gone through* the barriers of his obfuscation, of his provinciality, into "Europe." In his latter days, Strether's awareness was immense, for "in the high, clear picture—he was moving in these days, as in a gallery, from clever canvas to clever canvas . . ." (396).

The enclosure of idiom offers another kind of ambivalence, as near the end of *The Ambassadors* James exploits diverse implications of "come out." Strether is pretty definitely left behind and out of things. He has lost his chance with Mrs. Newsome and with Maria, his illusions about Mme. de Vionnet and Chad, and in general is left with only his belatedly acquired acuteness. When breakfasting with Maria, he tries to "come out" and tell her about "the article produced at Woollett," but he does not succeed. He recalls the early conversations with Maria,

the curiosity felt by both of them as to where he would "come out." They had so assumed it was to be in some wonderful place—they had thought of it as so very *much* out. Well, that was doubtless what it had been—since he had come out just there. He was out, in truth, as far as it was possible to be, and must now rather bethink himself of getting in again. He found on the spot the image of his recent history; he was like one of the figures of the old clock at Berne. *They* came out, on one side, at their hour, jiggled along



their little course in the public eye, and went in on the other side. He too had jiggered his little course—him too a modest retreat awaited. He offered now, should she really like to know, to name the great product of Woollett. It would be a great commentary on everything. (428-429)

This would mean a confession of his guilt, of his compromising himself with the wealth of Woollett, i.e., his venal sin. The passage also climaxes his European coming-out, his "arrival," his autumnal fruition through having opened himself to the inseminations of Europe. Chad spoke (425) of himself as being the man to go home and take over the advertising of his mother's business, as being finally the person Strether took him for when Strether "first came out." For, arriving in Europe from America meant coming out (cf. 341), out of one's provincial narrow-

ness, although Jim, Chad, and Strether use the expression also as one might in saying "come out West." Moreover, the connotation of "to make out" definitely attaches to it.

At any rate, these examples should offer evidence of the kind of stress and pressure that James places on language during his later period. His use of quotation marks to focus attention from oblique angles, to furnish a kind of abstruse notation system, does not constitute a disinfection or fumigation, as the purist at first might infer. Rather, it is James's attempt to draw off all the possible meaning within a particular context and still not destroy the potential of that expression or word in a future one. Indeed, the subsequent usage resonates with the earlier implications while vibrating on its own frequency.

### Jamesmanship vs. Gemlikeflamemanship

I once asked him to pay a call on the sole surviving sister of Walter Pater. The poor lady lived much alone. I fear that the visit was not a success. . . . Hester Pater glared at him and told him that she hated "horrid" ghost stories about children. This turn of the screw became so painful that we soon rose to go. On the doorstep of the tiny house, whence he was perfectly audible from within, James discriminated long and loud in this manner: "Pater? *Walter* Pater? Well, yes. Yes, well enough—after a fashion; that fashion being of a kind somehow prone—I might say calculated—to bring forth, to be conducive to, *legend*. Part of the legend survives in there; the old lady, I mean, survives. She looks *cross*. I suspect she *is* cross. May crossness explain her solitude?" I believe these two survivors had no second meeting.

RICHARD JENNINGS

*Note:* The Jamesiana on pp. 278, 282, 285, 288, and 297 are quoted from *The Legend of the Master*, ed. Simon Nowell-Smith (1948), pp. 8-9, 89, 74, 91, 65, and 77, with the kind permission of the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons.

# What the Writer Teaches

WALKER GIBSON

IN THE RASH of recent journalism on the role of the writer on the campus, there is an odd omission. The writer "in residence" has been described as a kind of heady stimulant, as a desirable contact with Life Itself, as a merry source of faculty-club gossip. Concern has been expressed for the effect on him of his academic shackles, while universities have been praised as the new patrons of the arts. In all this discussion, however, it seems rarely to have been suggested that the writer does any *teaching*, or if he does, what sort of teaching it is.

Well, does he? and what sort is it?

Is it the writer's function, for instance, to turn out Writers—to train students to compete in the current literary market? For most writer-teachers at most undergraduate colleges, such a goal is absurd: first, because it can't be done, but more important, because this pre-professional aim is clearly at odds with the meaning of liberal-arts education.

Still, most people seem to agree that there should be available to liberal-arts students some training in what is called "creative writing." Until such training, however, is felt by both student and teacher to be a working part of the general course offering, of the entire education, the writing course will continue to be—and rightly—looked at askance, and the writer on the campus will continue to be a faculty maverick, regarded with suspicion by his colleagues if not by himself. The undergraduate writing course, properly defined, is *not* a training ground for would-be professional writers, except incidentally. There is of course the occasional Really Talented Youngster who is clearly the teacher's pleasant responsibility to assist and encourage, but the frequency of such wonders has been exaggerated by ambitious entrepreneurs of author-

factories who have misdefined their primary function. This function is precisely the same as that of all undergraduate teachers of literature: it is to enlarge and refine the literary experience of the student, to make the student more aware of words. It seems obvious that a disciplined course in writing can contribute to such an awareness, and can provide an important part of the student's whole literary upbringing.

## II

But there is another and perhaps even more direct way in which the writer on the campus can contribute to the education that is his business. Some of the techniques that the writer learns to perform as he works with writing students can actually be adapted usefully to other courses in the literary curriculum—for instance, to the "period" course in poetry. Suppose that in a course in American poetry one requires the student to write a poem of his own, in which he imitates as closely as he can the vocabulary, characteristic attitude and verse form of, say, Emily Dickinson. What is worth mentioning about such an exercise is not that it should be assigned but that a teacher of creative writing in particular might be able to do something with the results. Here is the response of a fairly ordinary student to such an assignment—a student who very possibly never wrote a poem before in his life. I place beside (1) the student's effort (2) a genuine poem by Emily Dickinson which is so close to the student's "imitation" as to suggest that it may have been lying open on his desk as he worked.

- (1) I do not know if this be all  
That God has given me,  
Or whether I shall know the light  
Of Immortality.

I only know that you have been  
 Closer to me than breath;  
 And since you've gone, I cannot tell  
 If this be life, or death.

- (2) My life closed twice before its close;  
 It yet remains to see  
 If Immortality unveil  
 A third event to me,

So huge, so hopeless to conceive,  
 As these that twice befell.  
 Parting is all we know of heaven,  
 And all we need of hell.

Perhaps the first thing to point out here is how very good this is: superficially at least the student's poem does sound more or less like Dickinson. (Indeed one might remonstrate that his imitation is too slavish, that he followed one individual poem too closely.) In meter and rhyme and vocabulary this student has certainly echoed his mistress successfully, and I may add here that these mechanical matters do not seem to be very difficult for most students after the first few attempts. One of the things a student can learn from this sort of exercise is that it is easy enough for him to construct lines that look more or less like a Real Poem. Some of his awe, his very natural reluctance to approach very closely to poems at all, can be broken down in this way. At the beginning the teacher may be making some elementary criticisms much like those he makes to his beginner-poets in a writing course ("Do you really have five stresses here?"), but it is surprising how quickly most students surmount these mechanical matters and one can pass on to questions more interesting.

No reader of *College English*, of course, will have any difficulty distinguishing the true Dickinson from an amateur's imitation, however successful, and it is the *difference* between the two that is educationally useful. The kinds of questions one might ask in order to demonstrate this difference to a class are much like the questions a teacher of writing asks of his tenderfoot-poets. By directing

attention to what is wrong with the student's poem one can arrive in fairly dramatic fashion at what is right about Dickinson's. I suggest one simple question as an example, confining it to the first line alone: why is the student's opening so dull? The briefest discussion of this problem ought to bring out the contrasting virtues of Emily's first line, with its paradox or pun on "close." There is a play of wit here that makes all the difference. One could write as piously and almost as "feelingly" as Emily herself, using her vocabulary and her verse forms, but without that intellectual attention to words and delight in playing with them, which become finally one with the feeling, any imitation is a poor thing indeed. You can't imitate *that* successfully unless you *are* a poet!

### III

I believe that even larger questions, of historical changes in poetic style, can be approached in this way. Consider our old friend, the Romantic Revolt. Every student in every survey course knows about the Romantic Revolt. He knows that back in the Georgian period Pope based his satires on assumptions of an orderly society, and so "naturally" used orderly rhymed couplets. Came the Revolutions, American, French, and Industrial. Then Wordsworth, concerned with the individual in a society now seen as hostile or disorderly, "naturally" used varied and far less restricted forms of versification. The really dangerous thing about these happy truisms is that they may be right, in a way, and the student, having uttered them to an examiner's satisfaction, rests on his words. How can the teacher force his way back through the student's words to his senses; how can he make the student feel this great development, not with mouthed platitudes, but in his ears, in his bones? There are many ways, no doubt, but I am arguing that one way is to ask the student, again, to write imitative verses of his own, on which the teacher can then employ some of the critical tech-

niques familiar to the teaching of writers.

To the assignment, "Write a few lines of verse about the college campus, first in the manner of Pope, then in the manner of Wordsworth," a student recently responded as follows:

Is there no mind or virtue in this place,  
No reason writ on any person's face?  
Students! Go forth and bend your c'rrupted  
mind  
To greater studies, studies of mankind.

Still was the world and quiet too. With God  
The end and the beginning, guiding me,  
I saw the college and I thought that here  
The world was made complete, that here was  
life

And nature fused harmoniously . . .

While these performances are not particularly memorable as poetry, I think that pedagogically they are of interest. There are of course two college campuses here and they are worlds apart, controlled to a degree and defined by two different poetic disciplines. This student, while he was incidentally having a good time, was learning a little something about the different approaches to language necessary to a neo-classical and a Romantic poet. Observe even his three dots at the end of his Wordsworth imitation. They imply, that the rush of feeling one experiences in "Tintern Abbey," for instance, can hardly be imitated in a few lines; that you need space and plenty of it. An examination of the "Pope" passage in the way that a writing-teacher might examine it will bring to light another distinction between professional and amateur verse something like the one between the genuine and the imitated Emily Dickinson. Here we might look at the last line: "To greater studies, studies of mankind." What is the matter with that line? It is "padded," as a creative-writing class might express it; the repetition is almost useless. Might it not have read, just about as meaningfully, just "To greater studies of mankind"? And if we contrast it with the famous line of Pope's after which it

was presumably modeled—"The proper study of mankind is man"—we see the enormous difference between a repetition that merely serves to fill out the meter, and a repetition ("man") that functions dramatically in a great poet's statement. The proper study of mankind is man. Here a piece of illogic has been worked off on us, brilliantly. It is suggested that of course "man" is the proper study of mankind"—why, the very words are the same! The choice of the same term to signify the study and the one who studies is what makes the line triumphant, and this can be demonstrated easily simply by changing one of the terms into a weaker synonym. "The proper study of mankind is humans." "The proper study of the human race is man." Pope's device here is a minor one, perhaps, in his huge bag of tricks, but surely one way for the student to appreciate it is to find out that he couldn't do it himself.

#### IV

I have mentioned the usefulness of these verse-writing exercises for removing some of the awe that for most students surrounds the great poets. Certainly one of the first effects on the student is his immediate impression that he is one with Pope and Wordsworth. "This isn't so hard after all!" But after that it is the teacher who must make sure that such an impression is fleeting. The student is to be praised for imitating as well as he did, for beginning to assume, himself, a position from which to compose readable lines of a particular kind. But the real point is not the similarity but the difference. The gap between the student's poem and the poet's poem is the teacher's job to demonstrate, and in doing so he will not only be displaying the wares of the poet in question, but also teaching something about good poetry in general. Finally it is awe of the great poets that we are trying to teach—not a frightened and ignorant awe, but an awe as knowledgeable and rich as the teacher can make it.

# Bearings for Readership

WILLIAM W. MAIN

WERE a teacher of literature to teach his students how to play a game of cards, the students would probably learn either the origin and history of one-eyed jacks or the ambiguity of aces. It is doubtful whether the students would ever get down to the main business of learning how to play the game, that is, of learning what a card is worth instead of merely what a card is. If one teacher goes to the extreme of historicity, the other teacher, probably younger, will go to the extreme of preciosity. This contrast has its parallel in Francis Bacon's simile of the ant and the spider, found in *Novum Organum*. "Those who have handled sciences have been either men of experiment or men of dogmas. The men of experiment are like the ant; they only collect and use: the reasoners resemble spiders, who make cobwebs out of their own substance."

An historical ant, for example, would characteristically teach Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* as an adaptation of Plutarch's *Lives*. Behind this method of studying a work in terms of its material antecedents seems to lie the alchemist's desire to understand how lead becomes gold. Hence the detailed account of the facts in the hope of accounting for the facts. Hence the external concern for material and agent—source and author—in the hope of understanding the creation itself. But this natural desire to understand the miracle of genius and imagination all too often hardens into a myopic complacency of accepting lead as the transformed gold. In an historical study of *The Rape of the Lock*, for example, the actual Miss Arabella Fermor frequently overshadows the artistic creation, Belinda. The meaning of Belinda is not dependent on Arabella; Belinda's meaning depends on the perennial vanity of

Eve herself as reflected in the glass of eighteenth century decorum. And so far as historical scholarship provides this glass—this spirit of an age—all readers of literature should be grateful. In fact, only ungrateful fools refuse to see the relevance of the spirit of an age and the value of the history of ideas. However, there is always the danger that over-emphasis on historical setting will obscure the artistic use of historical materials for ultimate ends of understanding and self-criticism. The artist must speak in the language of his generation but still be meaningful to another generation in its own terms, for each age is confronted with the same problem of examining life.

In contrast to the ants, the precious spiders are the creatures "who make cobwebs out of their own substance." Preciosity plays the literary game in a distinctly characteristic manner: with wild cards. The chief wild cards, so to speak, are the extra-literary disciplines of psychology, sociology, and anthropology, as well as linguistics and semantics. In the Twenties particularly, queens and one-eyed jacks were wild; every hand was an Oedipus complex. (To be sure, Frazer had reassessed the deck by making dying corn gods wild.) Should the story of Jonah and the whale be scrutinized in these extra-literary terms, Jonah may be reduced to a creature of biological impulse, economic competition, or rebirth ritual. The psychological critic would interpret Jonah's anxiety as a repressed incestuous desire which is symbolically fulfilled when he is swallowed by the whale. Not satisfied by this wish-fulfilled return to the womb, the sociological critic would interpret Jonah's anxiety as a result of the hostile tension between Jonah and the mariners on the ship; because of the economic principle of competition, the



mariners throw Jonah overboard. Or again, the anthropological critic would interpret Jonah as a rebirth archetype of the dying vegetation god that is resurrected, for, after being swallowed by the whale, Jonah is vomited up on land. None of these arbitrary interpretations is meant to obscure the real value of an extraliterary frame of reference, namely, that the meaning of literature depends not so much on the historical subject matter as on the perspective one selects to view that subject matter. If some perspectives are credible only to biased minds, a legitimate standpoint must rest on its comprehensiveness and general plausibility.

Although collecting materials and spinning hypotheses can be useful and exciting, the question of meaning cannot be seriously raised until there is a transformation from what a thing is to what a thing is worth *in a system*. In contrast to the ant and the spider, Bacon goes on to use the bee as a symbol of transformation.

But the bee takes a middle course; it gathers its material from the flowers of the garden and of the field, but transforms and digests it by a power of its own. Not unlike this is the true business of philosophy; for it neither relies solely or chiefly on the powers of the mind, nor does it take the matter which it gathers from natural history and mechanical experiments and lay it up in the memory whole, as it finds it; but lays it up in the understanding altered and digested.

The decisive factor, as Ernst Cassirer emphasizes, in transforming given data into meaning is the system of values and concepts that resolves things into relationships. In brief, the bee seeks an intellectual interpretation within a conceptual context. If, therefore, meaning depends on a system of values, the first obligation of the teacher of literature is to give his students a system of values and a conceptual context for interpreting the literature they read; in short, to give students bearings for readership.

Kinds of values should be clearly dis-

tinguished. Artistic and aesthetic values in literature are very important, but they are incomplete. Pure artistry and form, of course, may be an end in itself; one may admire in abstract the skill of a sestina, the cadence of a prose rhythm, or the symmetry of a five-act structure. Rhetorical and compositional values, however, fulfill only half the function of literature, for literature has a cognitive function as well as an aesthetic function. Great literature must offer both philosophical and poetic values. In this analysis I shall arbitrarily restrict discussion to the cognitive or philosophical side of literature.

Although any system of philosophical values implicitly assumes some ethical scheme, moralistic interpretation must not obscure true intellectual understanding. The simple moralistic orientation so characteristic of high school literature courses ("This teaches us that a person should not . . .") must be broadened in undergraduate courses by a more mature insight into the springs and consequences of human conduct. Instead of seeking a moral in everything (a much better practice than finding a moral in nothing, however), students should begin looking for irony, pathos, and tragedy in their reading. In brief, their moralistic perspectives must be enlarged to more ideologic and critical perspectives. The simple bilateral alternatives of right and wrong must be viewed in more complex relationships of truth and error. Simple moral distinctions, frequently complacent and humorless, between good and bad obscure the ambiguity of the truth and the complexity of reality. Perhaps the growth that college teachers of literature could best cultivate in their students is an expansion of students' vision from moralistic judgments to ironic and tragic illuminations. The following guiding principles of interpretation for stories, plays, and poems, therefore, endeavor to illuminate irony, tragedy, and pathos by analyzing the interrelationships of truth and error.

If science is founded on the assump-

tion of a coherent universe of causality in nature, literature is founded on the opposite assumption of an incoherent freedom in human nature. This incoherence may be expressed in various ways: incoherence between error and truth, between self-interest and general interest, or between the human will and the divine will. Though the individual is free to relate himself to either center—for example, to a false center of pride of intellect or to a true center of loyalty to country—almost inevitably he overestimates his ability to see and to choose the true center. Either he will aspire to more than he can do or fall short of what he ought to do. Both paths end in incoherence. Irony arises from an unawareness of the contradiction between the truth of limit and the error of pretension. Only through disillusionment—the results of limitations catching up with pretensions—can this unawareness be replaced by understanding, and only through repentance and forgiveness can the incoherence be remade coherent.

Irony as revealed by this conceptual measure of truth and error may be illustrated with some familiar stories. In the major plot of Dickens' *Great Expectations*, for instance, Pip, the young hero, leaves honest Joe Gargery for vindictive Miss Havisham and the cruel beauty Estella. Thoroughly victimized, Pip eventually repents his own ingratitude to Joe and to Magwitch, his true benefactor, and is forgiven. A high school student might see in this story the lesson of obedience to parents and distrust of women. A college undergraduate, however, should perceive the ironic pattern of the story. The innocent Pip, tempted by the deceiving Miss Havisham, eagerly aspires to wealth and to beauty and forgets gratitude and Joe. Blinded by self-centered pretensions, Pip becomes ripe for disillusionment and eventually suffers an ironic refutation of his pride. The incoherence between truth and error is finally restored through Pip's repentance and Joe's forgiveness. The

narrative events of *Great Expectations* should thus be transformed into an ironic condition, in this case, the condition of innocence being awakened to truth through disillusionment.

The ironic pattern of awakening may be discerned in such widely diverse works as Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. In the former the self-confident heroine, Isabel Archer, deceived by Madame Merle, unwisely rejects her English and American suitors for the predatory dilettante, Gilbert Osmond. Disillusioned, Isabel awakens to her blindness and pride and is left to suffer for her folly. The fact that her folly is purged through suffering and punishment does not vitiate the essential triumph of her discovery of the truth; in fact it is the humbling of her spirit that gives reality to her triumph. In a different historical setting, *Don Quixote*, the old knight-errant, clings to the false ideals of romantic chivalry and to his own vain illusions of knighthood. However, through real suffering for this grand self-deception and through his final dangerous illness, Quixote recovers his true bearings, renounces chivalry and dies penitent. Thus the ironic pattern of over-estimating the truth by the error of egocentric pretension is fulfilled. Both Isabel and Quixote experience an ironic espousal and refutation of error by truth. It is a perception of these ironies that illuminates a student's understanding of literature.

In each of the illustrations just given the irony is resolved by contrition; the various pretensions are recognized and given up. However, irony may also end in despair and hatred. For example, the overreaching hero in Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* ("forward wits . . . practice more than heavenly power permits") vainly tries to eat his cake and have it too, but despair overcomes him. Again, Captain Ahab in Melville's *Moby Dick* becomes obsessed by "an audacious, immitigable, and supernatural revenge" which blinds him to his ironic pretensions and con-

sumes him in hatred ("I will wreak . . . hate upon [Moby Dick]"). A pretentious denial of limits, therefore, ends in either contrition, despair, or hatred, depending on whether or not error is renounced for truth.

A second guiding principle for interpretation interrelates truth and error in a tragic context. If the measure of irony is the denial of truth by errors of pretension, the measure of tragedy is the sacrifice of truth for another truth. The severity of the tragic conception is usually beyond the comprehension of the tender-minded, who are restricted to a simple moral division of right or wrong, good or bad. Tragic sacrifice, on the other hand, compels decision to choose wrong in the name of right, to embrace the bad for the sake of the good. Tragic conflict most frequently occurs in situations of conflicting loyalties. For example, in Sophocles' *Antigone* the issue is whether or not to honor by burial Polynices, a foe against Thebes. As ruler of the state, the tyrant Creon forbids honoring a foe. As loyal sister of Polynices, Antigone disobeys Creon's decree. Thus the equal rights of state and of family tragically clash; in sacrificing the rights of the family for the rights of the state, Creon loses his son and wife. Recognition of his guilt and harsh tyranny, however, restores him to truth in his self-exile. Again, in *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare confronts the self-righteous Brutus with a tragic choice between love of friend or love of country ("Not that I lov'd Caesar less, but that I lov'd Rome more"). Brutus sacrifices the rights of friendship for the rights of Rome by treacherously murdering the alleged tyrant Caesar. Unlike Creon, Brutus never recognizes his guilt; he commits suicide unaware of his self-righteous betrayal of friendship. In the ballad of *Sir Patrick Spens* the two loyalties in conflict are obedience to the king and responsibility to the men. Ordered by the king to sail in stormy weather, Sir Patrick Spens sees the folly of such a command and

the demand for allegiance. Sir Patrick, loyal to the king, sails forth with his "mirry men all," fully aware of the doom that awaits them "fiftie fadom deip." It is characteristic of all these examples of conflicting loyalties that tragedy always results in sacrificing one value for another, of committing a wrong for the sake of right.

A final guiding principle for interpretation interrelates truth and error in a pathetic context. The measure of pathos is the enslavement of truth by error, so that truth becomes a helpless victim of capricious determinism. The freedom of choice necessary to irony and tragedy is eliminated in pathos; truth and error remain permanently incoherent. Man is viewed as a mere victim of some blind power, such as classical fate, medieval fortune, or modern society and heredity, and his only strength against pathetic imprisonment is patience and acceptance of a meaningless suffering. If in irony earth be at strife with heaven, in pathos heaven seems to be at strife with earth. Consequently, the pathetic context characteristically shows fatalism inflicting the sins of the fathers upon the sons, or the wheel of fortune flinging down the good and raising the bad. The pathos of modern determinism achieves perhaps a common inhumanity among its victims, who can suffer untoward circumstances only in resignation instead of in repentance. The early naturalistic novel *Maggie* by Stephen Crane set a pattern for the pathetic victim of social determinism. Here the innocent Maggie is driven to prostitution and suicide by sordid squalor—drunken parents, an ignoble brother, and a worthless lover. In Ibsen's *Ghosts* the son, Oswald Alving, is the pathetic victim of hereditary disease from the profligate father. Again, in Kafka's *The Trial* some one unknown in high authority orders the arrest of Joseph K. Joseph vainly tries to discover the reason for his arrest. He is finally killed, never knowing what his crime was. Perhaps some one had told lies about

Joseph K. The truth is imprisoned in a labyrinth of obscurity.

When these various contexts—ironic, tragic, and pathetic—are applied to non-dramatic literature, such as a descriptive or lyrical poem, they become more static. Shelley's description of the king in *Ozymandias* is clearly ironic; Browning's portrayal of the innocent duchess victimized by the heartless duke in *My Last Duchess* is pathetic. *Sir Patrick Spens* has been shown to be tragic. Melodrama, of course, is a return to the simple moralistic context of good inevitably defeating bad. The comic context, related to satire and irony, is essentially limited to fortuitous incongruities, without a causal relation between them. Melodrama and comedy are accessible to students long before they ever come to college.

To gain sufficient bearings for readership, I feel, one must go beyond historical data and arbitrary patterns to governing principles. The historical ant that collects materials has formulated the valuable idiom of an age, and the precious spider that spins extra-literary webs in which to catch a poem or play has formulated interesting new perspectives. Still, the conceptual bee must transform the subject matter of literature into some system of values so that a literary work has meaning ultimately in terms of self-criticism and understanding. With this Socratic aim in mind, I have suggested three basic contexts based on a constant

conceptual measure of the interrelationships of truth and error. In the ironic context truth is denied by the error of pretension; recognition of exceeded limitations rewards the reader with laughter and understanding. In the tragic context truth is sacrificed for truth; recognizing the conscious choice of a wrong for the sake of a right inspires pity and admiration in the reader. And in the pathetic context truth is enslaved by some capricious determinism; the reaction to truth victimized by error can be only pure pity. Each of these contexts exists as a constant condition, ready to be exemplified and fulfilled by some specific factual content. Without some such context based on guiding principles, it is impossible to read literary masterpieces and come out with a cognitive meaning and credible interpretation. It is my belief that it is not enough to see in a literary work what the author is physically picturing, for a story or a poem is more than an image; it is an image incarnating some relationship to truth. Without a sense of relation, proportion, and system, a story or poem can only be, never mean; for the reader, untrained in readership, can only record and register, never interpret and transform. Hence the need for bearings beyond the book, because, as Browning says at the end of *The Ring and the Book*,

... a book shall mean, beyond the facts,  
Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.

## New Critic But Old Bellwether Writ Large? An Anglo-American View

I would gladly see a New Critic in every public school and high school; at college level, however, the approach has serious limitations. For teaching people to read, the intensive study of a small number of texts selected for the problems of understanding which they present, is the correct method but it is deplorable when a person of twenty takes these texts as an official canon. . . .

W. H. AUDEN, *New York Times Book Review*, 15 May 1955

# Let's Teach Grammar Too!

GEORGE G. GATES

AS A PROCESS of language unity, grammar reveals the structural process of writing. The structural process of writing can be expedited by teaching five language blocks—each a basic element of the English sentence. To make the five language blocks function in the student's writing is a primary purpose of teaching the grammatical process.

Traditionalists who have made a fetish of Latin terminology and method of teaching the grammatical process will object vigorously to the foregoing propositions. Those who adhere to grammatical osmosis through writing will question not only the propositions but also the methods. Those who subscribe to the patterns proposed by C. C. Fries in *The Structure of English* will take likewise a dubious view. But no one of these, it is hoped, will reject finally the proposal presented here until he and his students have found the principle, the idea, and the method false and unproductive. Those, however, who find in the proposal only new names for old structures will miss the fundamental idea.

The first, and the basic one, of the five language blocks, with which all others work, is the S-V-O, the old Subject-Verb-Object triumvirate. Three of the blocks are given numbers—1's, 2's, 3's—numbers that have no virtue in themselves, but that aid in avoiding the weight and error of conventional definition and terminology. The fifth block is the small s-v-o. These five language blocks are the means by which the structural process of writing is done. The ways these five language blocks work with each other are the "grammar" of the English sentence, and are of most use to the student in his writing and reading.

Examples of the 1's are: *by the library, on the wall, over the river, beyond the atomic era, in the Dark Ages, to run the*

*race, to split the atom, to divide the spoils.* The Latinist will call these prepositional and infinitive phrases and will point out that if these modify the noun, they are adjective phrases, that if they modify the verb, they are adverbial phrases, and that if they function as the noun, they are noun or substantive phrases. But a student wishing to write doesn't need, it has always seemed to me, the "double-talk" of "now, this is really a prepositional phrase, but it modifies the subject and hence is called really an adjective phrase, for the subject is a noun and adjectives modify nouns." This "double-talk" is verbiage to most students and to a few teachers. But its verbiage is not its worst fault. The worst fault lies in the parts-of-speech analysis of language that such a labeling and such a method imply.

What a student needs to know, and to be taught if he doesn't know it, is how to use *by the library, to split the atom, and beyond the horizon* to say what he means and to get from another's writing the meaning conveyed through this language block. He needs to know where this block may be placed in relation to the S-V-O or to the s-v-o or to the 2's or to the 3's. For example, he may need to be shown the pattern:

S-V-O

1 1 1

Then he may write: The book of old poems brought for a moment memories of his childhood. He may try further to discover what happens to his thought if he writes: "The book of a moment brought from his childhood memories of old poems." Or this: "The book of his childhood brought of old poems memories for a moment." Or: "The book brought for a moment memories of old poems of his childhood." He may also try: "The hour to strike determines the moment to



fight." But whatever he writes to discover for himself where and how in the sentence the 1's work by position and function to convey his meaning teaches him *directly* the structural process of writing. Learning the structural process of writing teaches him what to do and how to do it—two things he needs to know. Freeing the student from cumbersome and erroneous terminology is like freeing a well man from crutches. But more important is the idea of relation and unity and meaning the student gets: a respect for the grammatical process.

Examples of 2's are: *knowing the cause, wanting to be popular, writing on the board, taking defeat, splitting the atom*. This language block works with S's and O's (s's and o's, 1's and 3's) but not with V's unless the V is a form of *to be* (and then, depending on the position or word order, of course, it is not a 2; it is a verb). It is a 2 only if it works with the S's and O's (s's and o's, 1's and 3's). The 2 some will insist on calling present participle or gerund or verbal or verbal adjective or verbal noun, and it may still be all these. But knowing simply that the 2 works with S's and O's (s's and o's) helps the student do two things: to link the 2 in his own writing with an S and/or an O to avoid error in the sense and meaning ("dangling participles") and to read the 2 in other writing as working with the S and/or O instead of taking it as the verb without the verb form ("is running," "was going"). One of the difficulties encountered in teaching students from the seventh grade through the freshman year in college is the student's insistence on the 2 as a verb. (His insistence may be the result of the definition of a "participle" given in many grammars and repeated in many classrooms: a participle is a VERB ending in "ing" and used as an ADJECTIVE.) Because of this difficulty, the student needs to work directly with such patterns as this:

S-V-O  
2 2

From this pattern he may write: "*Knowing the cause for their plight*, the colonies declared the motives *lying beneath their action*." Or he may work with:

S-V-O

s-v-o

2 2

and write: "When the colonies knowing their plight declared the motives lying beneath their action, they startled the world." From such patterns the student can see and know directly the structural process of his own writing, and in knowing the structural process of his own writing will find other writing easier to follow and to comprehend. When he finds such words as "reading," "speaking," "singing," and "laughing," he does not try to read them as verbs unless he sees that they have a different form: "am reading," "was speaking," "will be singing," "have been laughing." Nor does he write "Wishing to leave now, the library closed."

Example of 3's are: *defeated trying, broken in spirit, sold on the block, caught speeding, known on heaven or earth*. Many students are already familiar with this block, and some use it with skill. But a few students like Frost's farmer in "Mending Wall," once having learned the 3 as a *verb* won't go behind their teacher's teaching. At first such students write and read the 3 only as the verb. Such a sentence as: "An army defeated in battle will always surrender," is meaningless in its syntactical content—for some freshmen. They learned that "defeated" is a verb and so it is. With these students, telling them that "defeated" is a past participle and that past participles modify nouns and pronouns or substantives and thereby become adjectives seldom seems either to improve their skill in reading or to increase their knowledge of the structural process of their own writing. More important for the student is his experience in what he can do with the 3 in his own writing. For instance he may work with:

S-V-O  
3 3

and get: "Prometheus, chained to a rock, endured the agony inflicted upon him by Zeus." (The 3 is most ambiguous structurally in many English sentences. In this sentence, "chained to a rock," points out Prometheus' condition as one meaning and as the place where he endured the agony as a second meaning. The two meanings are not antithetical, but the "Janus" nature of the structure causes the student to falter.) Further the student may work with this pattern:

S-V-O  
s-v-o  
3 3

"Because Prometheus, chained to a rock, endured the agony inflicted upon him by Zeus, Prometheus gained man's love."

To show the interworkings of 3's with 1's and 2's; 1's with 2's and 3's; 2's with 3's and 1's would take more space than is available. But these interweaving patterns are a fruitful study, especially if the student is given the chance to work directly with his own structural process of writing. And to know these interweaving structures of the 1's, 2's, 3's is to increase speed of reading and power of comprehension.

The final structure is the small s-v-o. The small s-v-o works with the large S-V-O as in this pattern:

S V O  
s-v-o s-v-o s-v-o

With the large S and O, the small s-v-o

has such sign words as *who, which, that*. With the V's, the small s-v-o has such signal words as *when, if, since, until, because, although*, etc. At first the student may work with the simpler pattern:

S V O  
s-v-o

and write: "A nation that neglects morale invites defeat." Or he may work gradually to a more complex pattern:

S V O  
s-v-o s-v-o s-v-o

"A nation that neglects morale when that morale means victory invites defeat because a nation's morale provides the strength that insures that nation's triumph." And then the student may go on to such a pattern as:

(s-v-o) V (s-v-o)  
s-v-o s-v-o

Here the (s-v-o) is the subject and the object, grandma's old substantive clause. The student may write: "Why a nation invites defeat when its morale provides no strength does not explain why a nation neglects morale when that morale means victory."

What so often happens in the teaching of grammar is that the grammar is left out. We teach terms, we pick out subjects, we diagram the "prepositional phrase": we neglect the grammar, a process of language unity that reveals the structural process of writing.

## We Teach the Child English

I shan't go into the crimes perpetrated under the slogan, "We teach the child, not the subject," for that has already been done in many recent publications. I can't forbear pointing out the syntactical inadequacy of the statement, however, which seems to me to be highly suggestive of the intellectual emptiness of some of the programs built upon it. *Teach*, I take it, in this context is a transitive verb and *child* is the indirect object. Where is the direct object? *What* is taught to the child? Whatever others may do, I pray that you and I may keep our eyes on our direct object: we teach the child English.

JOHN GERBER, 1955 President of NCTE, page 251 of this issue

## Round Table

### THE CASE OF THE DRUNKEN GOLDFISH

Nathaniel Hawthorne incorporated into "The Great Carbuncle" an age-old spoof of town misers: "Another of the adventurers was Master Ichabod Pignort, a weighty merchant and selectman of Boston, and an elder of the famous Mr. Norton's church. His enemies had a ridiculous story that Master Pignort was accustomed to spend a whole hour after prayer time, every morning and evening, in wallowing naked among an immense quantity of pine-tree shillings, which were the earliest silver coinage of Massachusetts." The Carlylean surname Pignort is the reader's cue to believe the "ridiculous story," slander or not. The rich skinflint is fair game for vulgar derision. And anyway it's just a joke.

But by the time the same story pops up in Frank Norris's *McTeague*, some sixty years later, the passion for naturalism demands a straight and sombre face. The dentist's estranged wife is the familiar figure of the miser who lives in tatters rather than spend any of her hoarded gold. "One evening she had spread all the gold pieces between the sheets, and had then gone to bed, stripping herself, and had slept all night upon the money, taking a strange and ecstatic pleasure in the touch of the smooth flat pieces the length of her entire body." Norris's style cannot permit, as Hawthorne's could, the inclusion of neighborhood gossip. He is so determined to be real that he forces the anecdote from the folklore of the comic tightwad onto a character whose limited imagination and austere nature make the incident grotesquely inappropriate. And while the reader might accept the cruel joke that Trina was *capable* of sleeping naked on her gold pieces, to be told-matter-of-factly that she *did so* reduces the woman to an absurd figure and diminishes the tragedy of her murder.

When an author finds a joke too good not to be true, he stands in danger of losing both the joke and the truth. A classic example is the case of the drunken goldfish. The young poet in Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* surveys a Boston saloon rather bemusedly:

The prettiest object in the saloon was a tiny fountain, which threw up its feathery jet through the counter, and sparkled down again into an oval basin, or lakelet, containing several gold-fishes. There was a bed of bright sand at the bottom, strewn with coral and rock-work; and the fishes went gleaming about, now turning up the sheen of a golden side, and now vanishing into the shadows of the water, like the fanciful thoughts that coquet with a poet in his dream. Never before, I imagine, did a company of water drinkers remain so entirely uncontaminated by the bad example around them; nor could I help wondering that it had not occurred to any freakish inebriate to empty a glass of liquor into their lakelet. What a delightful idea! Who would not be a fish, if he could inhale jollity with the essential element of his existence!

A hundred years later a strikingly similar saloon shows up in the Paris of Arthur Koestler's *The Age of Longing*:

The bar had mild, diffused lighting, comfortable leather armchairs, and an aquarium full of strange, coloured, goggling fish which had a calming effect on people's nerves. It had been frequented by the neo-nihilists until the day when a friend of Father Millet's niece had poured a double martini into the aquarium, making the fish first drunk then die. He had been sued for damages by the proprietor, a mysterious gentleman whom nobody had ever seen, and who was rumored to be a commercial attaché to one of the South American legations. The trial had created an enormous sensation, for the culprit, a pupil of Professor Pontieux, had based his defense entirely on the tenets of neo-nihilistic philosophy. His lawyer had read long passages from the master's "Negation and Position" to show that the "why-notist" attitude in general served a high moral purpose and social function, and that in the particular case in question, the fish had probably attained a degree of happiness before dying which in the normal course of events would forever have been withheld from them. The defendant's action, he claimed, had enabled them to become free in the profoundest sense of the word, and thereby to surpass the limitations of their ichthyological condition. The judge, however, had awarded the proprietor full damages, which amounted to a considerable sum, as the fish had been imported from tropical waters. The neo-nihilists were outraged; they launched a public subscription to collect the fine, and denounced the judge as a collaborator, a Fascist, an enemy of the revolutionary proletariat and of the Freedom loving Common-

wealth. They also imposed a boycott on the bar, much to the relief of the three nice barmen and of the more staid clientele.

Where Norris was too busy being scientific to see a joke, Koestler is too angry and too political to sit back and enjoy one. He is determined to make the existentialists and Communists look foolish, and he accomplishes this only by making himself look foolish in the process. He reports the fish-poisoning, trial, and boycott in the same tone he uses for all the other incidents in his crowded and solemn novel, so that his style reminds one of Gabriel Heatter, selling world disaster and Tums without a change of tone or pace.

Grafting the story onto the main body of his novel, Koestler rings in Professor Pontieux, Father Millet's niece, and a circle of faceless left-wing bohemians who are standard props in "Paris" novels. In addition, his quest for needless verisimilitude leads him to introduce (for his sole appearance in the several hundred pages of *The Age of Longing*) the proprietor, "a mysterious gentleman whom nobody had even seen, and who was rumored to be a commercial attaché to one of the South American legations." To beat his foes with a few dead fish, Koestler creates an unseen South American, one more loose string in a novel which already resembles a wilted porcupine.

Most important to people who like literature is the fact that Koestler is so interested in being real and significant that he quite forgets his craft as a writer. Contrast with Hawthorne's freshness such tired Koestlerisms as "a calming effect on people's nerves," "in general served a high moral purpose and social function," "free in the profoundest sense of the word," "which amounted to a considerable sum," and the absolute barbarism, "making the fish first drunk then die." If literary quality was sacrificed for realism, the sacrifice was in vain. Who can believe that the incident could have become a *cause célèbre* in frightened Paris or anywhere else?

And this perhaps is the biggest joke on the joke-killers: Hawthorne's inspiration for the drunken goldfish reverie comes right out of his notebooks, recorded after a trip to a favorite tavern on 16 May 1850, a year

and a half before he began work on *The Blithedale Romance*. He had a whim and he reported a whim. Koestler and Norris both reported whims as facts in the belief that they were bringing literature closer to life. The contrast with Hawthorne makes their error clear.

MAURICE A. CRANE

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### KEEPING STUDENTS READING

*We've Been Reading*, an experiment to increase student acquaintance with current books, is a series of five or six reviews of about seventy-five to ninety words mimeographed on colored legal-size sheets and issued periodically throughout the academic year.

It is a common experience that many of us, students or teachers, will most likely read something that has been praised, or is related to something that we are interested in, or has been pointed out to us by teacher or librarian or friend as a book that would appeal to us particularly. We began by recommending books to individual students who, we felt, would be interested enough to read them. When they finished, and after they talked over the book with us, had played around with the ideas and issues involved, and had exchanged questions and suggestions, they tried their own review. The first attempt did not always cover enough of the real substance, or else it failed to point up the real significance. The second or third revision, after further conferences, usually resulted in something that would tell another student whether or not he might want to read the book.

Because we are a small community of about eight hundred students, we decided to make the adventures in reading a faculty as well as a student project. We also wanted to cover a variety of tastes—science, music, fiction, biography, world affairs, or drama—in the hope of encouraging as divergent a range of interests as possible. The word limit on the reviews is often a bit frustrating to our colleagues who want to say more than seventy-five words about the book they've read, but the problem of condensation is a task they must deal with themselves.

Since we began printing the reviews, we

have rarely found a student not interested in trying his hand. There has not yet been an instance when anyone has begged off on the grounds that he was too busy. This experiment is not the answer to the complex problem of encouraging free reading among college students, nor does it have such far-reaching influence as to give us any illusions, but in its small way we do believe that it is a good thing and worth all the effort involved—worth enough, that is, to continue the series.

SIGNI FALK

COE COLLEGE

#### FURTHER REMARKS ON TEACHING POETRY

Mr. Darrel Abel's "How to Teach Students to Read a Poem" (*CE*, Nov. 1955) seems to involve a number of critical oversights. No doubt his method is effective, but is it enough to be effective when one concludes that Hodgson's "February" means that "the severities of nature destroy all but the hardest forms of organic life?" I think not, and my students would be likely to ask, "So what?" Perhaps Mr. Abel's answer to such questions is not quite satisfactory. Will not overdue attention to verbal matters tend to cow the student? A professor who knows the meanings of "swarth," "iron," "breeds," and "germane" is certainly an impressive person.

The difficulty with Mr. Abel's method—the use of refined paraphrase—is that it may neglect the real meaning of a poem. Poetry deals with both thought and feeling, and it was because of the latter that Plato burned the books. No prose paraphrase can do justice to the emotional aspects of a poem, and they may be the important aspects, as they are in Elizabethan love poetry. Paraphrase merely simplifies the literal sense for those who do not speak the language, and no one who has read I. A. Richards can have much faith in the method. And does not Mr. Abel distort Hodgson's poem (not a particularly happy example for this sort of analysis anyhow) in his article? Where in the paraphrase can one find the fear and terror that contemplation of the winter image arouses? Of what use is it to tell a student that "there is everlasting physical assault upon organic life" or that "integrity is superior to force?" To over-

emphasize the verbal sense is to wrench the meaning at the expense of the emotional.

A poem is a complex of thought and feeling and, if good, cannot be said otherwise. No part is the whole. Of course, teachers should persuade students to look up words they do not know, but a poem is not merely a sum of words. Some understanding of the emotions involved is necessary before a student knows what a poem means. I like to approach this problem through four questions based on Richards' methodology. First I ask students to consider the feeling the author wished to engender in his audience. This usually starts a discussion about the nature of the audience itself. The addressee is not the same in "How like a winter hath my absence been From thee" as in "Let me not to the marriage of the true minds Admit impediments." Next, the author's attitude towards his audience is important, especially in a sonnet like Milton's "I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs," where the poet delicately, with a pronoun reference, associates the audience with himself and the intelligensia. The poet's attitude towards his material is also important, and finally the student must be made to examine the literal sense of the poem. These questions and others that are corollary to them correspond roughly to Richards's four categories, but I seldom build them into a poetic. They are a useful pedagogy by which it is impossible to neglect the emotional aspect of poetry.

Something further must be done to help a student develop critical judgment, for otherwise what justification can there be for teaching poetry to engineers, for instance? It is not enough merely to understand; the student should learn why Shakespeare is better than Edgar Guest. I make no widespread claims for the merits of my system, nor do I believe that everyone can use it advantageously. The Abel system may work better for some teachers, and certainly it is better than nothing. It does, however, encourage a shallowness of interpretation that is disturbing. Perhaps the main problem in teaching poetry is to pass along enthusiasm for the subject. No one who bottles emotion into paraphrase is likely to attain complete success at such a venture.

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# Current English Forum

CONDUCTED BY THE NCTE COMMITTEE ON CURRENT ENGLISH USAGE

MARGARET M. BRYANT, *Chairman*

Q. Will you distinguish between the meaning of *sit* and *set*? (L. W. C.)

A. *Sit* (*sat, sat*) and *set* (*set, set*) are not synonyms but they have been confused for centuries. The attempt to settle the confusion by stating, as do most textbooks, that *sit* is intransitive and that *set* is transitive and therefore needs an object is useless. Both verbs are used transitively and intransitively. *Sit* was originally intransitive, meaning "to take a seat" or "to be seated," and *set* transitive, meaning "to cause something to sit," as to *set a pitcher on the table*; that is, "to put or place the pitcher on the table." Although this distinction was once made, each verb has developed other usages which are now Standard English. *Sit* is used transitively to mean "to seat (oneself)" as in "*Sit yourself on that bench*"; "to keep one's seat upon," as "*She sits her horse well*"; "to place in a seat, cause to sit," as "*Sit the baby up*," meaning specifically "to cause the baby to sit." All of these meanings are standard usage, recorded in the *ACD*, *WNCD*, and *WNWD*. In like manner, *set* is intransitive in the following instances: "to sit on eggs" as "*The hen set for one week and left the nest*" or "*the setting hen*"; "to pass below the horizon," said of heavenly bodies, as "*the setting sun*" or "*The moon sets tomorrow at four o'clock*"; "to become hard or solid," as "*The cement set after four hours*"; "to become fast or permanent," said of colors, as "*The color set in the material*"; "to assume a rigid state," as "*The muscles in his face set*"; "to hang" or "to fit," as "*The coat sets well*"; "to have a certain direction or course," as "*The current sets to the east*." The name of the hunting dog, the *setter*, gets its name from "setting," or pointing out game by standing in a rigid position. One can see that *set* is rather frequently employed as an intransitive as well as a transitive verb. Perhaps it will be safe to say that *set* is generally transitive and *sit* intransitive, but one should not forget the other meanings which have developed in

each instance and are now Standard English. On the other hand, "*Set down for a few minutes and rest*" is nonstandard usage. (M. M. B.)

Q. Is it correct to use *whose* in "This is the house *whose* roof is leaking?" (E. H. P.)

A. Yes. *Whose* is the possessive case of *who* and *which*. It is employed interchangeably with *of which* and often in preference to the periphrastic construction. "This is the house *whose* roof is leaking" is less cumbersome than "This is the house the roof *of which* is leaking." Insistence upon the *of which* phrase often forces one to employ an awkward construction instead of a much simpler one. *Whose* as the possessive of *which* is Standard English according to the *OED*, the *ACD*, and handbooks such as the *Scribner Handbook of English* (Marckwardt and Cassidy), *Writer's Guide and Index to English* (Perrin), and *Writing and Thinking* (Foerster, Steadman, and McMillan). It has been used to refer to a neuter antecedent from the time of Thomas Malory to the present. (M. M. B.)

Q. Can *sure* be employed as an adverb in good usage? (D. B. B.)

A. In formal English *sure* is an adjective: "There is no *sure* way of gaining popularity," and *surely* is an adverb: "She *surely* is a popular young girl." In colloquial English, however, *sure* frequently functions as an adverb, meaning "yes" or "certainly"; "Are you coming?" "*Sure*" or "*Sure, I'm coming*"; "It *sure* was good to get in out of the cold." Careful speakers would not employ *sure* in this way, but the use of it as an intensive affirmative answer is more firmly established than the use of it in such a sentence as "This *sure* was a good book." A number of dictionaries now include the colloquial usage, among them the *ACD*, Funk and Wagnalls' *NCSD*, and

*WNWD*. *Sure* is almost idiomatic in such expressions as "*sure enough*" and "*as sure as fate*"; "And *sure* enough the accident occurred"; "That will happen as *sure* as fate." Would anyone substitute *surely* or any other word here? It does not seem likely. (M. M. B.)

Q. Is it necessary to use *so . . . as* in negative comparisons? (R. T. S.)

A. Formerly many texts held that *as . . . as* was to be used in positive comparisons (John is *as* courageous *as* James) but that *so . . . as* was necessary in negative comparisons (John is not *so* courageous *as* James). Although some careful writers may prefer *so . . . as* in negative statements, the Leonard survey in *Current English Usage* (1932) classified "He did not do *as* well as we expected" as established. Either may be employed. (M. M. B.)

Q. Is *none* correctly used in the plural? (J. W. W.)

A. The indefinite pronoun *none* may be used in the singular or plural, depending on the meaning intended: "*None* of his report was comprehensible" (no part of it); "She took out six books but *none* of them were interesting to her." The *WNID* (2nd ed.) states that "as subject *none* with a plural verb is the commoner construction." For emphasis *no one* or *not one* may be used instead of *none*. (M. M. B.)

Q. What part of speech is *rather*, given as a response to a question? (E. L. S.)

A. *Rather* is usually an adverb; when it is employed as a response, it is really an interjection, an emphatic affirmative, meaning "certainly!" or "yes indeed!" It is a

common response in England, used in informal speech, that is colloquially. One occasionally hears it in American speech, but more often in imitation of British English. (M. M. B.)

Q. Should *as to* be included in sentences like "The question *as to* whether Mary should go to college or get a position is unsettled"? (R. F. W.)

A. No. *As to* is Standard English in an introductory phrase when something is to be emphasized or pointed out: "*As to* the truth of the statement, I am not in a position to say"; "*As to* Jane, I am undecided." Here the meaning is "concerning." When, however, it is placed before such words as *whether*, *when*, *where*, and *how*, it is weak, ineffective, and unnecessary. Say instead: "The question whether Mary should go to college or get a position is unsettled." In other instances a simple preposition, generally *about*, *on*, or *of*, may well be substituted: "There is no question *as to* (substitute *about*) the accuracy of the statement"; "Did the doctor make any statement *as to* (substitute *about* or *on*) the new vaccine?" "He is certain *as to* (substitute *of*) her sincerity." (M. M. B.)

Q. Is *begun* also used as a past tense of *begin*? (A. A. G.)

A. The preferred principal parts in standard formal English are *begin*, *began*, *begun*. For the past tense, *begun*, the old plural, has come down to the present day and is heard in popular speech. Most texts and dictionaries list only *began*. The *OED*, however, includes *begun* and Funk and Wagnalls' *NCSD* (1947) lists it as one of the alternative forms for the past tense without any restricting label whatever. (M. M. B.)

## Classification

Freshmen giggle and wonder,  
Sophomores defy and decry,  
Juniors, dispassionate, ponder,  
And Seniors affirm and deny.

EDITH B. DOUDS

# Councilletter

## THE 1955 CONVENTION

The forty-fifth annual meeting of NCTE took place in the Hotel Commodore in New York from Thanksgiving Night through Friday and Saturday following. Below are brief reports of sessions which may be of interest to college members of the Council.

GENERAL SESSION. Norman Cousins, editor of *The Saturday Review*, spoke on "The Information Crisis in America," and John C. Gerber, retiring President of NCTE, presented the Address, "The Greater Struggle Necessary." Professor Gerber's penetrating and persuasive remarks are printed in this issue, as well as some biographical information, and one cannot recommend too highly the professional value of perusing both items.

THE ENGLISH TEACHER AND SPEECH. That speech should be an integral part of the general English class was the keynote of the main speakers, Professors Robert C. Pooley (Wisconsin) and Magdalene Kramer (Columbia). There was reference to the assertion in *The English Language Arts* that every student must receive instruction in speech throughout his career. Although special courses for students with special interests are in order, speech training in the integrated language class is the only logical way of providing this training for the majority of students. The speakers cited many opportunities for speech activities in the general class which may be used regularly as the work proceeds from unit to unit. Speech was seen as a motivation for effective writing, and reading aloud as a means for discovering the readability of one's writing, for evaluating it generally, and for furthering the appreciation of literature. Although certain practical problems accompanying the integration of speech and English were mentioned, and although at least one statement opposed an integrated course, majority sentiment favored continued efforts to bring speech and English into a unified setting when required of all students, with other courses reserved for those with special interests. (Reported by Professor Richard A. Meade, Virginia)

THE ENGLISH TEACHER BUILDS PERMANENT READING HABITS. With Dean Thomas Clark Pollock (N.Y.U.) as chairman, the following two college teachers participated in panel discussion. *Lawrence Conrad* (Montclair, N.J., S.T.C.): We should begin with whatever the pupil is reading. Any book is better than no book. It's easier to refine than to start. Know the pupil—his needs, tastes, interests; and search to have the right book, at the right time, for the right person. Certain things teachers do actually retard the formation of lifetime reading habits. One is the "huff and puff" approach with its emphasis on the enormity of the reading task. Another deterring factor is the talk about books as "literature." A third is the old-fashioned book report. If the only purpose is to check, the book report is too cumbersome. Pupils may, however, communicate informally with their peers about books, and groups may bring a program to the rest of class with genuine profit and pleasure. A fourth deterrent is the fact that books are treated too much as strangers. The use of paperbacks can help with both number and variety. *Walter Loban* (California): Is the reading done in the schools breeding anti-intellectualism? Are charges of low visibility and complacency true? Are books like *All American* and *Seventeenth Summer* enemies or aids to culture? Overly ambitious adult programs can delay interest in books. *The House of the Seven Gables* with its symbols of evil needs many bridges from immaturity to the adult point of view. Reading programs must take into account the nature of adolescence. Yet we must not underestimate these pupils. There must be order and increasing challenge in their reading. The total reading program must include intensive reading of both old and contemporary classics, and extensive, guided "free" reading. (Reported by Professor M. Agnella Gunn, Boston University)

OUR PROFESSIONAL POTENTIAL. Professor Warner G. Rice (Michigan), the chairman, pointed out that 60-80% of the teaching done by English professors is to non-majors. Certain changes are imminent,

he warned, in our profession, chiefly the use of automation and a concomitant lowering of professional standards. To cope with large enrollments, mass production methods of industry will possibly be applied to education (such as "farming out" some of the teachers' duties to non-specialized help, with a resulting stratification of college instructional personnel). G. Kerry Smith (NEA) devoted the greater part of his talk to criteria of professional stature. Professor William Sutton (Ball S.T.C.) circulated and elucidated the findings of his poll of the college English teachers of Indiana. Their indifference to the poll and the lack of intelligence with which they answered the questions lead one to take a dim view of the wisdom of relying on the rank and file in arriving at standards for our profession. Professor Edward Foster (Georgia Tech) spoke on "What Most Teachers Want," defining his group as the 12,000-or-so "generalists"—teachers of required courses to non-majors in college English classes of whatever kind of school. His answer to the question from a sampling (39) of such teachers at the 1954 NCTE meeting revealed that not pay, and not even a course of their own, was the highest desideratum; it was "satisfaction in the subject"—love of the subject and the knowledge that English is respected by all. In planning the project to investigate the resource potential in our profession, Foster suggested the following poll questions among others: (1) Do we need and want a formulated professional standard for college English? (2) Can research be used to improve professional achievement and status? (Reported by Professor Edward Stone, Virginia)

**COMMON THEMES IN LITERATURE FROM MANY COUNTRIES.** Roy P. Basler, well-known teacher-critic now in the Library of Congress, spoke on the literary affinities between American and Oriental culture. His emphasis in the nineteenth century fell on Emerson and Whitman, whose doctrines of the universal self, of diversity-in-unity, of intuition, and of material symbols of spiritual things are paralleled in Eastern philosophy and literature. Basler also noted the direct influence of Chinese poetry on such twentieth-century American poets as Amy Lowell and Carl Sandburg. Cleanth Brooks (Yale) warned

against over-emphasizing themes in literature as leading to the notion that works are "superior sermonizing." Actually, Brooks insisted, works have problems rather than solutions in common, and he cited four such themes: (1) the choice between goods or between evils, (2) the self-discovery, (3) the journey, and (4) the quest myth. Harrison Smith, Associate Editor of *The Saturday Review* and former publisher, reviewed the themes of the American novel since 1900, and issued a number of rambling, fascinating, and controversial *obiter dicta*, especially about his old friend and stable William Faulkner.

#### APPROACHES TO LITERATURE.

With Professor Gay W. Allen (N.Y.U.) as chairman, a lively panel discussion of Whitman's "When Lilacs Last" was presented to an overflowing audience. Professor De Wolfe Miller (Tennessee) set forth the historical background of the poem; Malcolm Cowley, critic and poet, attacked the weak diction and tone of Whitman's piece; and Professor Charles Davis (Princeton) attempted to show the poem's satisfying structure.

**ANNUAL BANQUET.** Archibald MacLeish delivered a profoundly stirring address on poetry and the teaching of poetry, which will be published in the *Atlantic Monthly* soon.

**COLLEGE SECTION.** Professors Brice Harris (Penn State) and Warner Rice (Michigan) presided over a long and disturbing report by Professor Norman Nelson (Michigan) on how the scientists and "social scientists" are undermining—chiefly by ignoring—humane, literary values, and no one is doing anything about it. Professor Charles C. Walcutt (Queens) added comments bearing out the speaker's warning.

**ANNUAL LUNCHEON.** Clifton Fadiman administered a literary quiz to Harvey Breit (*NYTBR*), Laura Z. Hobson (*Gentleman's Agreement*), Walter Kerr (*NYHT*), and Phyllis McGinley (light verse), thus tantalizing the many NCTE members who knew all the answers but could not deliver them in such a radio-recording session. Professor Morris Bishop (Cornell) set forth an excellent exhortation, "Faith in Literature," which may be read in the *French Review*.

## News and Ideas

THE READING PROBLEMS OF PRE-college students are the subject of a half-dozen articles in the *Bulletin* of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals for September, while a report on teaching reading to gifted children in the schools occupies much of the October issue. The first number also contains a handy summary of recent linguistic research, by Margaret Bryant, editor of our Current English Forum.

WHO WILL BELL THE CAT? ASKS Winifred Lynskey of Purdue in the Summer *AAUP Bulletin*, meaning: What writer or editor will risk a legal test-case to alleviate the ridiculous custom of getting permission to quote short passages in scholarly books and text books? We suggest that the AAUP and the ACLS investigate and take action.

TRAGI-COMIC CARTOON IN THE November *NEA Journal* shows a little girl sitting in the living-room with a book, calling: "I'll be there in a minute, Mom—just as soon as I finish this word."

TO OUTLANDERS, GREENWICH VILLAGE may seem to be reviving in the first issue of *Intro Bulletin*, which calls itself "The Only American Literary Newspaper." A monthly (\$1 a year, 10¢ a copy, Box 860, Grand Central Station, N.Y. 17), it contains interviews with Willem De Kooning and Harvey Breit, "A Word from the Silent Generation" by Robert O. Bowen, an unexpected parody of Pound, an article on the new Village coffee-houses, and a review of current advance-guard magazines.

AMONG THE SIXTEEN RETIRED teachers appointed as Whitney Visiting Professors for 1955-1956 are James Swenarton (Vassar, to Wilson College, Pa.) and Jay Hubbell (Duke, to Richmond). The Whitney Program attempts to strengthen teaching of the humanities in independent liberal arts colleges.

A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE FLESCHE controversy appears in the Fall 1955 New

York State English Council's *English Record*, which also contains remarks by last year's NCTE president John Gerber (S. U. Iowa) and a common-sense article on "The Uses of Structure and the Structure of Usage" by NCTE-er Donald Lloyd (Wayne).

TEACHERS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE and civilization can make use of every number of the posh *American Heritage*, but they may find the December issue especially significant, with the news about the sporting British officer who held his fire from General Washington, the conversations Frederick Bancroft had with the smug Henry Adams, and the close kinship (described by Perry Miller of Harvard) felt by colonial New Englanders for the Old Testament Israelites. There is also a major selection from S. E. Morison's new one-volume edition of his Columbus biography.

THE FIRST NUMBER OF THE EMERSON Society Quarterly, edited by Kenneth W. Cameron (Trinity, Box 1080, Hartford, Conn., \$2) has appeared, containing ana, reviews, bibliographies, and reproductions of early printed items and MSS.

WHAT COULD BECOME A CLASSIC statement of the artist's unwillingness to enjoy analytical criticism of his work is made by John Steinbeck in the Autumn *Colorado Quarterly*. In an occasionally Johnsonian attitude and expression, Steinbeck answers the fascinating interpretations of *The Grapes of Wrath* contributed by Bernard Bowron and Warren French to previous issues of the *CQ*. In the same issue there is a most helpful list of works and recordings in the field of modern music, compiled by Storm Bull (Colorado).

T. S. ELIOT'S FAMOUS QUESTION—"whether the attempt to teach students to appreciate English literature should be made at all"—is answered by the redoubtable F. W. Bateson in the October *UTQ*. The same issue contains an analysis, with translations, by Edmund Blunden, of some seventeenth-century Latin poems by Eng-



lish writers. The *UTQ*, beginning its twenty-fifth year of publication, has brightened its format, and, in a long editorial, reviewed its history.

SOMETHING OF WHAT PROFESSOR Norman Nelson (Michigan) was inveighing against at the College Section of the NCTE meeting in New York is presented by Earl C. Kelley (Education, Wayne) in "Education Is Communication" in the Summer 1955 *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*. "... The adoption of the scientific method ... is the paramount need in education today," opines Professor Kelley, and follows it up.

THE SOUTHERN LITERARY RENAISSANCE Symposium at the 1954 MLA, with papers by Louise Cowan, Harry M. Campbell, Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Andrew Nelson Lytle, was printed in the Summer 1955 *Shenandoah*, the triannual review published by Washington and Lee undergraduates but written mostly by well-known professional and academic figures.

"WHY DO NOT CATHOLIC COLLEGES and universities in the U. S. produce an adequate supply of Catholic writers?" was a question put by Professor Richard P. Coulson of La Salle College to 200 writers. Some of the answers, printed in the November *Four Quarters*, issued by the La Salle faculty, are by Allen Tate, J. F. Powers, John Dos Passos (who reveals a new biographical fact), Arthur Miller, and Walter Kerr.

PROFESSOR MICHAEL J. O'NEILL of St. Louis University notes further relevant material in Irish literary magazines: in *The University Review* for Spring 1955, there are unpublished lecture notes by Wilde for a speech in San Francisco; the Summer issue of *Irish Writing* is devoted to Yeats, with articles by Bradford, Allt, Kenner, Ure, Iremonger, and Davie.

THE N.Y.U. PRESS IS ENTERING the colossal project of a twelve-volume edition of Whitman, including a variorum *Leaves of Grass* and much unpublished material. Gay W. Allen (N.Y.U.), as one might expect, is general editor, and the board consists of Harold K. Blodgett (Union), Clarence C. Gohdes (Duke), Emory Holloway (Queens), Rollo G. Silver (Simmons), and Floyd Stovall (Virginia).

THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, with some aid from the Carnegie Corporation, is offering doctoral fellowships in American Studies with stipends of \$2000-\$4000. Applications for the next academic year close 1 March 1956.

THE DECEMBER *PMLA* IS THE BEST issue in many months. Over 300 pages of nineteen articles, including pieces on *Beowulf*, *Hamlet*, Milton, Johnson, Wordsworth, Newman, and George Eliot; a controversial linguistic analysis of Hopkins' much-analyzed "Windhover"; and five modern considerations—of Joyce, Forster, Cummings, Faulkner, and the use of Point of View in fiction—the last an excellent reference article long needed. All this plus an eighteen-page, eight-point-type, argument on the Fall in *Paradise Lost*.

THE BRITISH ACADEMIC QUARTERLY, *The Use of English* (of which more later), for Winter 1955, says of a 1954 issue of *College English*: "It is full of professional zeal, especially in its use of terminology that may look impressive to the scientists and technologists. . . . But perhaps one should not be put off too easily by the percentages and statistics and the bright ideas with projectors. . . . There are signs of life and enthusiasm at work here as well as mere crude energy. *College English* also finds room for critical essays. . . ."

### Ideaform Theme Paper

Have you tried out the new composition paper that allows you to comment more efficiently on your students' writing errors? Ask NCTE Headquarters (704 South Sixth St., Champaign, Ill.) for a free sample.

# New Books

Note: All books reviewed in this issue were published in 1955, unless otherwise noted.

## Poetry

THOREAU . . . VOICE IN THE EDGE-LAND, Langley Carleton Keyes (North Carolina, 131 pp., \$2.50). Author Keyes, formerly of Harvard, now an advertising executive, has composed "an intellectual and spiritual biography" in a sequence of 209 sonnets, the octave in each instance paraphrasing Thoreau's own words, the sestet contributing Mr. Keyes's amplification or interpretation of the thought of the

octave. A curious and self-thwarting attempt, since paraphrase is the most back-handed compliment one can pay an author, and Mr. Keyes's 6 × 209 lines of iambic pentameter commentary only very rarely achieve such lift or lilt as to justify putting them into verse rather than prose.

LOUIS B. SALOMON

BROOKLYN COLLEGE

## Fiction

ANDERSONVILLE, MacKinlay Kantor (World, 767 pp., \$5). In the winter of 1863 Camp Sumter rose in the pine woods of Georgia. During each passing month its unofficial name, Andersonville, grew freighted with deeper horror. Here, on twenty-seven acres of barren land, 33,000 Union prisoners were at one time confined. In one six-month period more than 9000 died. The causes were various: exposure and malnutrition, scurvy and dysentery, nervous-fingered guards without and criminal "raider" mobs within. Kantor's range in this novel is wide. There is the compassionate planter and the inhuman Superintendent of Prisons, and there are the men who were the prisoners, many described in detail. Worse than the stockade on Hokkaido or the *Kriegsgefangenen-lager* in Silesia, Andersonville seems meant to symbolize the war prison, its inmates the prisoner of war. Despite awkward dialogue and too many pages, this graphic and sympathetic distillate of twenty-five years'

study carries the reader along. And beneath the writing is the impact of the tragedy itself.

JOSEPH L. BLOTNER

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

TEN NORTH FREDERICK, John O'Hara (Random House, 408 pp., \$3.95). As in *A Rage to Live*, O'Hara writes a long story of how naughty the best people really are underneath. Moving back from Harrisburg to Pottsville, Pa.—the scene of O'Hara's best novel, *Appointment in Samarra*—he shows how ordinary and limited the apparently substantial Joseph and the beautiful Edith Chapin are when the facade of money and caste is torn away. Those readers no longer stimulated by the author's lengthy transcripts of "reality" and his disproportionate sexual revelations will rather wish that O'Hara could profit by examining the brief structure of "Richard Cory" and the moral of "Young Goodman Brown."

## Bibliography and Reference

SCHOLARSHIPS, FELLOWSHIPS AND LOANS, S. Norman Feingold (Cambridge, Mass., Bellman; Vol. I, 1949, 254 pp., \$6; Vol. II, 1951, 312 pp., \$5; Vol. III, 1955, 471 pp., \$10). What every college administrator, teacher, scholar, and student should know: how and where to apply for the \$30 million given away annually, in

some cases just for the asking. Each volume runs from A to Z (e.g., the American Academy in Rome to Zonta International administering the Amelia Earhart Scholarship) and has three indexes, but does not repeat the other volumes; Vol. III contains a master index.

HART CRANE: A BIBLIOGRAPHY, H. D. Rowe (Swallow, 30 pp., \$2.50). Lists of books by Crane, individual poems and prose pieces, miscellanea, and source material—compiled by a graduate student at Florida.

CARL VAN VECHTEN: A BIBLIOGRAPHY, Klaus W. Jones (Knopf, 82 pp., \$5). Twenty books and 150 articles by, 265 items about, are listed. With a lovely appreciation of Carl Van Vechten by Grace Stone.

A GUIDE TO THE RELIGIONS OF AMERICA, ed. Leo Rosten (Simon & Schuster, 282 pp., \$3.50, \$1 paper). An excellent handbook, clearly organized, to the

doctrinal and administrative facts about the major denominations in this country. The sections of Part I, originally published in *Look*, consist of direct questions like "Must Catholics accept everything the Pope says?" and "Do Methodists pray to saints?" with straight-forward answers by qualified spokesmen for each church. Part II is a series of tables of comparative doctrines, church membership, the clergy, religious education, and so forth.

A MANUAL FOR WRITERS OF TERM PAPERS, THESES, AND DISSERTATIONS, Kate L. Turabian (Chicago, rev. ed., 82 pp., \$1.25, paper). The works, right down to *ibid.* and *loc cit.*

### Literary Texts

THE PARKMAN READER, ed. Samuel E. Morison (Little, Brown, 533 pp., \$6). Reading a little Francis Parkman is better than not reading any. A book of selections provides at least an introduction to his magnificent historical epic, and some readers might proceed to the original work. Therefore, Morison's "Selections" are welcome. But they could be more effectively presented. The casual reader who bogs down in the opening analysis of Indian life will never reach the urgent narrative, the haunting images of the wilderness, and the characterizations so real they border on fiction. Nor will he find the too few maps

much help in grasping the entire panorama. The real complaint, however, is in the very nature of Parkman's work. Its profoundly epical quality cannot be realized from representative scenes. The reader who wants to experience the powerful account of the French and the English and Indians in America, with the deeply moving stories of explorers and priests, would do better to read an entire single volume, such as "La Salle" or "Montcalm and Wolfe," than to read bits and pieces, however admirably selected.

LEWIS FREEDMAN

CBS-TV

### Literary History and Criticism

THE MODERN WRITER AND HIS WORLD, G. S. Fraser (Criterion, 343 pp., \$3.95). This book is far more than the "cursory survey" that Mr. Fraser confesses to, but is not "sweeping" enough by half to merit its title. The first of its sections fills in the "Background of Ideas"; the remaining four discuss the novel, the drama, poetry, and criticism. The extensiveness of Mr. Fraser's own background may be guessed at from the synthesis he manages of such ideational forces as Proust, Vico, Kafka, Rimbaud, Hulme, and Kierkegaard. Similarly competent is his treatment of the individual forms. His study of the modern

novel, for example, proceeds from Victorian origins in James and Wells to the "Indian Summer" of Galsworthy, Bennett, Conrad, Kipling, and Forster, and then into the heart of its matter. Particularly valuable is his "Trends of Criticism." But alas! If there is any single literary form whose importance is characteristically modern, it is the short story; if any single literature, it is the American; yet both are excluded from this book. Hence such procrusteanism as a mere admission that Angus Wilson "is perhaps at his best in his . . . short stories" prefacing a detailed examination of Mr. Wilson's one (and apparently mediocre)

novel. As for the extent of the other damage done to the education of Mr. Fraser's Japanese students, for whom this material was originally prepared, consider that Hemingway appears only parenthetically in a thorough analysis of Wyndham Lewis; that not even in the index will they find Faulkner. No Dreiser, Lewis, or Wolfe, but much Ronald Firbank, L. M. Myers, T. F. Powys, and Rex Warner (yet no Richard Hughes). Lowes Dickinson is here, but not Emily; Froissart, but not Frost. Yet Eliot and Pound, Mr. Fraser's show pieces, are, in spite of everything he (or, to be sure, they) can do about it, American. *Scribimus, ergo sumus.*

EDWARD STONE

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

THE YELLOW RUFF AND THE SCARLET LETTER, Alfred S. Reid (Florida, 150 pp., \$3.75). The yellow ruff was the symbolic garb that the adulteress Anne Turner invented and was forced to wear at her execution for her part in the famous murder of Sir Thomas Overbury (1613). Professor Reid (of Furman) suggests that the accounts of the complicated murder "were Hawthorne's principal sources in composing *The Scarlet Letter*," and his fascinating evidence is convincing, although he recognizes that "Between these coarse materials and the finished artistic product of the novel there is a wide difference."

JAMES JOYCE AND THE COMMON READER, William P. Jones (Oklahoma, 168 pp., \$3). Professor Jones, Chairman at Western Reserve, was "first attracted to Joyce as a linguist" and believes that the use of words "is still the main 'theme' of *Ulysses*. He sees no reason why the common reader should not be able to follow this and other themes, if he only has a little help. Jones's book takes the beginner through *Dubliners* and *A Portrait*, and then settles down to four chapters on *Ulysses*. A brief look at the *Wake* concludes a brief book, admittedly not for Joyce specialists, but for the person who is "willing to work in order to understand any piece of writing that is worth the effort."

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR, R. H. Super (N.Y.U., 654 pp., \$7.50). In Profes-

sor Super (of the University of Michigan) Walter Savage Landor may well have found his definitive biographer, for in length and fullness of treatment, in exhaustive detail (much of it new), and in a scrupulous regard for factual accuracy this biography outstrips the earlier full-length lives by Forster (1869, 1876) and Elwin (1941). The careful and loving labor of fifteen years is evident in the massive array of documents cited (there are over 110 pages of notes and bibliography) and in the development of many matters twisted or ignored by Forster and unknown to Elwin. Professor Super's biographical method is that of current American scholarship: the detailed and exhaustively documented mapping or surveying of a life, a kind of day-by-day life-chart. The result is a pinpointed chronicling of the events of Landor's long life rather than an "interpretation" or a Strachey-like portrait. Mr. Super presents all the facts he has been able to assemble and leaves their interpretation largely up to the intelligent reader. But he does not altogether escape the pitfalls of his method: prolixity, occasional dullness of style, and lack of finesse in weighing and presenting a mass of factual detail. Yet the work is no cold and clinical case history. Mr. Super's admiration and affection for his irascible subject are evident throughout, although he is careful not to permit his feelings to blur his likeness. There is little about Landor's actual writings except the dates and circumstances of their composition, and little of a critical nature about Landor's ideas. But as the record of the long, tempestuous, and immensely prolific life of one of the greatest of English stylists (and a pathetically paradoxical "original") Super's biography appears likely, with good reason, to be definitive.

MARVIN B. PERRY, JR.

WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY

JAPANESE LITERATURE: AN INTRODUCTION FOR WESTERN READERS, Donald Keene (Grove, 114 pp., \$1, paper). A model primer, that makes the patterns of Japanese poetry, drama, and fiction clear at the same time that it heightens an Occidental's unwonted taste for such delicacy and convention—much as do the recent

Japanese art-films so popular in this country. One looks forward to Keene's *Anthology of Japanese Literature*, if it is as concisely presented as this little introduction.

**THE LIVING STAGE: A HISTORY OF THE WORLD THEATER**, Kenneth Macgowan and William Melnitz (Prentice-Hall, 543 pp., \$8). A first-rate survey of acting, play-writing, and staging, from the medicine-man to Tennessee Williams, written in a lively style by the versatile Macgowan and a colleague at UCLA, with fifty illustrations by Gerda With.

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN LITERARY CRITICISM**, ed. Floyd Stovall (North Carolina, 262 pp., \$4). Until a complete history of our criticism is compiled, this outline, with its organization and references, should serve teachers and scholars as well. The pattern from nationalism through romantic organicism to formal organicism in American criticism is traced first in the introduction by Stovall (Virginia), followed by a survey of 1800-1840 by Harry Clark (Wisconsin), 1840-1870 by Richard Fogle (Tulane), 1870-1900 by Robert Falk (UCLA), 1900-1930 by John Raleigh (California), and 1930-1955 by Hugh Holman (North Carolina).

**MIDDLETON'S TRAGEDIES: A CRITICAL STUDY**, Samuel Schoenbaum (Co-

lumbia, 275 pp., \$4.50). Mr. Schoenbaum (Northwestern) presents a thorough discussion of a somewhat neglected Jacobean writer of tragedy, Thomas Middleton. About one third of the book is a review and detailed consideration of authorship problems, always vexing where Middleton is concerned. Mr. Schoenbaum gives a strong case (admittedly based on internal evidence) for Middleton's authorship of *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, and, in the main section of the book, discusses these together with the tragedies generally acknowledged as Middleton's: *Hengist King of Kent*, *Women Beware Women*, and *The Changeling* (identifiable parts of the last by Rowley). His discussion of these five is perceptive; though he does not gloss over obvious defects, he reveals Middleton's strong points in the masterful use of irony, skillful blank verse, psychological interest in his characters, and the strongly moral impact of his prevalent theme: "the self-destructive nature of evil." Whether Middleton should be given the "foremost place after Shakespeare in the hierarchy of Jacobean writers of tragedy" is perhaps questionable. But Mr. Schoenbaum has certainly strengthened the claim to such a position.

ROBERT V. BAUER  
PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

## Anthologies and Texts for Reading

**BETTER READING ONE: FACTUAL PROSE**, Walter Blair and John Gerber (Scott, Foresman, 3rd ed., 478 pp., \$2.75); **READING FACTUAL PROSE**, W. L. Garner, D. G. Pugh, D. E. Wylder (Scott, Foresman, 64 pp., 75¢, paper). The third edition of an anthology-manual from Chicago (Blair) and S. U. Iowa (the other editors). The method of reading embodied in the books emphasizes careful consideration of "word meanings, context, and form—in relationship to the author's purpose and message." Part I, How to Follow Explanation and Argument, consists of short units of prose with detailed questions at the bottom of the page. Part II, How to Evaluate Factual Prose, has longer selections with questions at the end of each. Part

III, Problems of the Modern World, contains long and short essays and articles without questions. At the end is a fifty-page Student's Handbook—Hints on Reading and sample analyses. The workbook is a collection of analytical multiple-choice questions (answers in an Instructor's Manual), with ten timed reading tests and a number of theme suggestions. Altogether a varied and substantial course of study for teacher and student alike.

**BETTER READING TWO: LITERATURE**, ed. Walter Blair and John C. Gerber (Scott, Foresman, rev. ed., 829 pp., \$3.50); **READING LITERATURE**, Mark Ashin, Gwin J. Kolb, and Stuart M. Tave (63 pp., 75¢, paper). A solid, carefully selected an-



thology, with a separate work book and Instructor's Manual, from S. U. Iowa (Gerber) and Chicago (the rest). Part I considers and presents examples in The Nature of Imaginative Writing ("The emphasis is upon the reader's simply seeing clearly and describing what he has read"); Part II in Evaluations ("We use the plural of the word since we think that there are many literary values."); Part III—naturally the longest—in Literary Types (from *Ruth* to Esmé, Sophocles to Fry, the Psalms to Robert Lowell). The idea is to gain skill in reading in Parts I and II and then settle down into Part III, utilizing the excellent objective questions in the workbook throughout.

AN ENGLISH HANDBOOK, M. H. Scargill (Longmans, Green, 182 pp., \$1.25). As Prof. Allen (Minnesota) says in the introduction, Prof. Scargill (Alberta) has steered a middle course between traditional grammar and the new linguistics. The handy  $1\frac{1}{2} \times 7$ -inch size and the selective bold-face type are notable features.

NEW WAYS TO GREATER WORD POWER, Roger B. Goodman and David Lewin (Dell, 191 pp., 25¢, paper). A lively simplified manual of vocabulary, diction, and grammar, with varied exercises.

ENGLISH ESSENTIALS, Herbert B. Nelson (Littlefield, Adams, 206 pp., \$1.25, paper). "The purpose of this book will be to provide any student with enough basic practice material in English fundamentals to enable him to enter a regular freshman English class in any college or university." That is, the book is suitable for high school or college use. By the department head at Oregon State.

THOUGHTS INTO THEMES, Elizabeth Oggel (Rinehart, 72 pp., 95¢, paper). Twelve freshman themes, presumably from the editor's Illinois Wesleyan, arranged from "unacceptable" to "excellent," with the kind of detailed analyses every teacher would like to write; plus some corrective measures and exercises.

EVALUATING STUDENT THEMES, Ednah S. Thomas (Wisconsin, 39 pp., 75¢, paper). Fourteen actual student themes, doubtless written at Wisconsin, on the same subject, but the emphasis is on the right kind of terminal comment which the teacher should write. Especially valuable for beginning teachers.

A GUIDE TO CLEAR WRITING, William D. Baker (Michigan State, 48 pp., 25¢, paper). A handy pamphlet of fundamentals, enlivened by cartoons as well as an informal tone.

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## Letter to the Editor

SIR:

The articles in *College English* are always rewarding, but the most diverting to date is that by David Berkeley ["On Oversimplifying Antony"] in the November issue. I am looking forward to a series, preferably explaining why Cordelia hanged herself to spite King Lear and Hamlet set down the poisoned cup in front of Gertrude. There seem infinite possibilities.

Very truly yours,

MACMURRAY COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

RUTH O. ROSE

(Continued from page iv)

WALKER GIBSON ("What the Writer Teaches") is indeed a writer, who published an article in *CE* in 1950, "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers," often reprinted, but who is best known as a poet; his light-serious verse has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *Atlantic*, *Poetry*, and so on, and in a most satisfying collection, *The Reckless Spenders* (Indiana, 1954). With an A.B. from Yale and an M.A. from Iowa, he has proceeded to associate professor at Amherst. GIBSON's chief interest beyond poetry is poultry, but it is a FAE Fellowship that has taken him away on leave to New Mexico this year. WILLIAM W. MAIN suggests three principal "Bearings for Readership" to pass on to our students. An instructor at Rutgers, MAIN comes from Denver and North Carolina; he has

published explications of Renaissance poets; and his hobbies are Bach, "The Jungles of Darkest Ontology, and the best of all possible onion soups." GEORGE G. GATES's article, "Let's Teach Grammar Too!" was inspired by MacCurdy Burnet's "uggle wogs a diggle" piece in the Oct. 1954 *CE* ("Structural Syntax on the Blackboard"). With degrees from William Jewell, Missouri, and Stanford, GATES is a professor at Colorado State College of Education. He has published an essay on Jeffers in *CE*, and his extracurricular pursuits are chiefly of Arabian horses, whom he trains and shows. EDITH B. DOUBS, whose quatrain appears at the end of the Current English Forum, is associate professor of French at Albright; she attended the Sorbonne and has a Ph.D. from Cornell.

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